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Vol. XX.

Published Every
Week.

Beadle & Adams, Publishers,
98 WILLIAM STREET, N. Y., August 15, 1883.

Ten Cents a Copy.
\$5.00 a Year

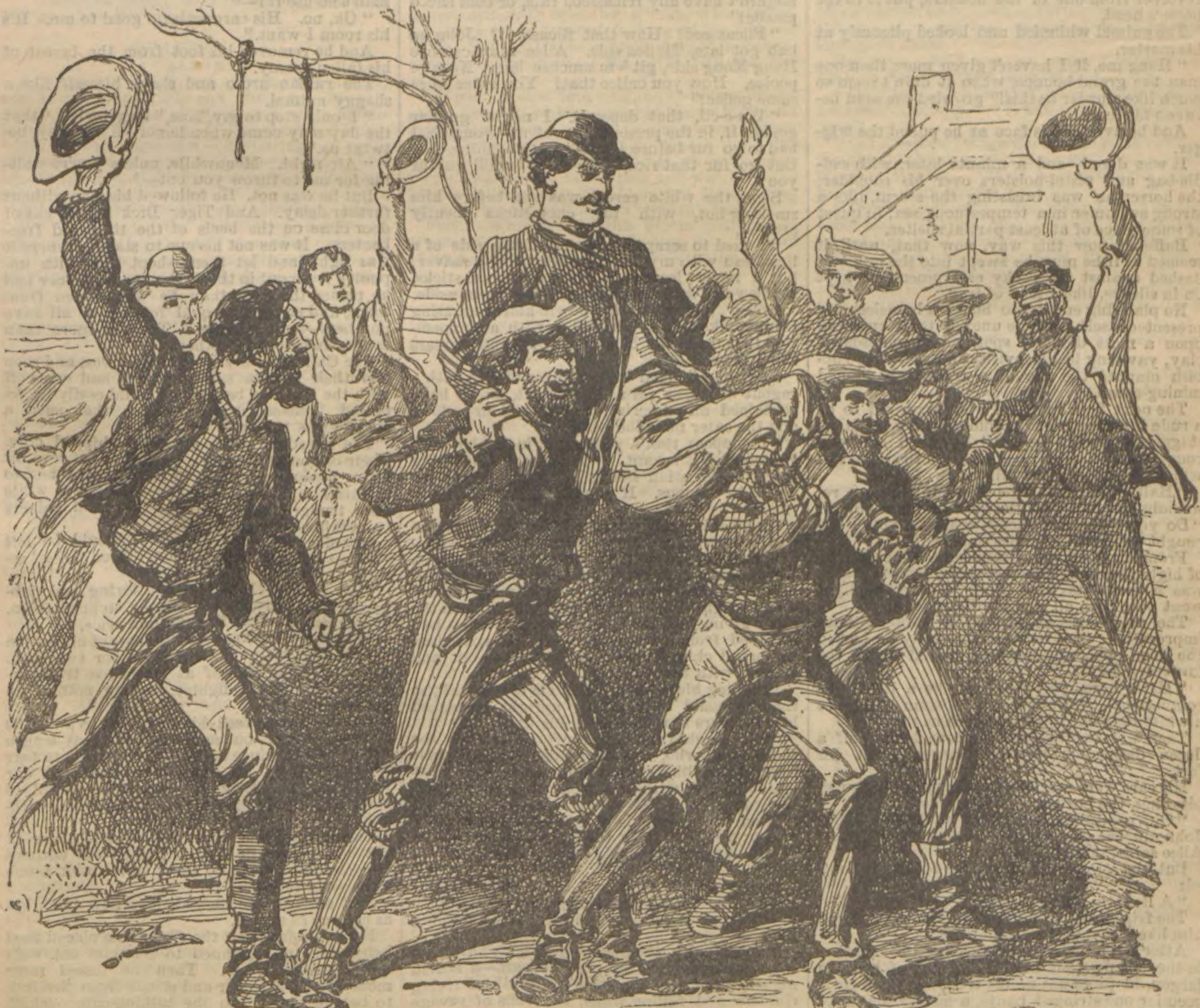
No. 251

TIGER DICK vs. IRON DESPARD; or, Every Man Has His Match.

AN ACCOUNT OF THE "LEETLE DIFFIKILTY" AT FOOL'S LUCK.

BY PHILIP S. WARNE,

AUTHOR OF "THE GENTLEMAN FROM PIKE," "A MAN OF NERVE," "ALWAYS ON HAND," "TIGER DICK, THE FARO KING," ETC., ETC.



THEN IRON DESPARD WAS "CHAIR'D" ON THE SHOULDERS OF HIS ADMIRERS, AND BORNE UP AND DOWN THE STREET.

Tiger Dick vs. Iron Despard; OR, Every Man Has His Match.

An Account of the "Leetle Diffikilt"
at Fol's Luck.

BY PHILIP S. WARNE,

AUTHOR OF THE "TIGER DICK" AND "PATENT-LEATHER JOE" SERIES. "ALWAYS ON HAND," "A HARD CROWD," "THE GENTLEMAN FROM PIKE," "A MAN OF NERVE," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

JOHN CHINAMAN'S GUEST.

"WELL, I'll be hanged if this isn't a pretty mess!"

And the speaker gazed helplessly at his prostrate horse.

The animal lifted its head, whinnied faintly, made an ineffectual effort to struggle to its feet, and with a cry of pain sunk again to the earth.

And the wind howled dismally among the writhing pines, sweeping the rain in great drenching sheets that shimmered in the lightning-like fabric of silver gossamer, while the crags around reverberated with the crashing thunder and the roar of a mountain torrent that filled the gorge with tossing foam.

"Deuced comfortable prospect—to camp under the lee of some overhanging rock, soaked to the skin and half-famished!" pursued the horseman. "But perhaps I ought to consider myself lucky to have whole bones in my skin, wet or dry. Surefoot hasn't fared so well as even that."

He bent down, and took hold of one of the horse's legs.

It was evidently broken by the fall the animal had just sustained.

"I hate to finish you, old fellow; but it's the only thing left," he went on, and drawing a revolver from one of the holsters, put it to the horse's head.

The animal whinnied and looked piteously at his master.

"Hang me, if I haven't given more than one man the grand bounce, when it didn't seem so much like murder as this!" growled the man between his teeth.

And he averted his face as he pulled the trigger.

It was done!—and a minute later, with saddle-bag and pistol-holsters over his shoulder, the horseman was breasting the storm, like a strong swimmer in a tempestuous sea, in quest of some place of at least partial shelter.

Buffeted now this way, now that, until it seemed as if he must be swept into the gulch or dashed against the rocky escarpment, he kept on in silence, like a man of iron.

No place big enough to house a homeless dog presented itself, until he unexpectedly emerged upon a most desolate spot, where mounds of clay, yawning black cavities and scattered rubbish marked the site of a hastily-abandoned mining-camp.

The next flash revealed what appeared to be a rude brush hut; and, avoiding the pitfalls, he staggered toward it, until he stood before a roughly-constructed door, through the chinks of which struggled a few faint rays of light.

"Hallow, pardner!" he shouted, adding a resounding appeal with the butt of his revolver. "Do you keep closed doors against a poor devil caught out in this witches' sabbath?"

From the darkness within came a chattering of high-pitched voices, suppressed by fear; there was a momentary scuffling sound; the light went out; then all was as still as death.

The man without uttered a contemptuous imprecation; then without ceremony he kicked the door open, and stooping, passed under the low entrance.

"Hallo here, you rats! Strike a light!" he commanded. "Do you play 'possum, and leave a white man out in such a night as this?"

Then a blaze of lightning showed him half a dozen despicable wretches cowering at his feet.

His ears were assailed by a magpie chatter of pleading, the burden of which was:

"Oh, good 'Melican man! no lobbee John! John mucbee poor man—no catchee pay dirtee! Allee same, no hab got—"

But the stranger stamped his foot and shouted:

"A light! a light! a light!"

The frightened Celestials scurried away from him like a covey of startled pigeons.

After not a little tumbling over one another in the darkness, amid an abundance of heathen jargon, in pitch not unlike the picking on their peculiar one-stringed banjo, a smoky tongue of flame was produced at the end of a rag stuck in an old sardine-box containing grease.

Then through the smoke that filled the hut

these wretched paroies of men, pale and baggad, and with a dreamy vacancy about their bias-set eyes, grinned deprecatingly at their guest.

Peculiar-shaped, long-stemmed pipes, wires, and a little pot of porcelain containing a muddy-looking paste, showed that they had been interrupted at their favorite vice—opium-smoking.

In its enjoyment they had evidently lolled on a shake-down of dried mountain moss, which was the only sign of a bed in the hut.

Coming in from the pure mountain air, the stench was almost stifling.

"Ye gods, what a rabbit-hutch!" muttered the stranger, frowning and puckering his nose with disgust. "I shall have to share their vermin along with their hospitality! It's a question whether the storm isn't preferable. But the man who made this had an eye to rude comfort."

And he strode across to a large fire place, built of sticks daubed with clay.

Throwing his saddle-bags upon the hard earthen hearth, he said:

"Start a fire here, John, while I stand myself in the corner to drip, like an umbrella. Come, be lively! Do you think a Christian cares to see you bobbing and grinning before him as if he were one of your hideous wooden idols?"

They soon realized his wish to the full, building such a bonfire as threatened to drive their guest from his cosey nook.

Soon his soaked garments, and even the little pools and rills of water that had dripped from his person on the hearth, began to smoke; but, averting his face when the heat became too great, he still alternately spread his hands toward the fire and rubbed them, with evident enjoyment.

But his other discomforts were beaten off only that the wolves of hunger might renew the assault, and he called lustily for food.

"Eatee lice! eatee lice! Chinaman John catchee heap good lice. Give 'Melican man chop-chop," chattered a grinning and ducking Celestial.

"Oh, yes," laughed their guest; "only if you would learn to pronounce it in a little more Christian fashion you wouldn't run such risk of spoiling the flavor. I suppose, now, you mightn't have any fricassee rats, or cold sliced poodle?"

"Flicasseed? How that flicasseed? John no hab got lats, 'Melica side. Ailee same catchee Hong Kong side, git 'em mucbee lats. No sabe poolee. How you calle that? You eatee alles same gofleef?"

"We-e-el, that depends. I might go fur gopher if, in the present state of my stomach, I had to go fur before I could get anything else. But go fur that rice, chop-chop, or I'll go fur you!"

Soon the white cereal was set before him smoking hot, with the chop sticks neatly crossed.

"I used to scrape molasses off the side of a hogshead with my fingers when I was a shaver; but I never learnt to eat with drum-sticks, thank you," said the guest, putting them aside.

And whipping out his bowie-knife and using it much like a shovel, he fell to with an expedition that made the bias eyes of his entertainers fairly cross.

They had flanked his porringer of rice with a ragout which, as far as looks went, might have contained any description of fish, flesh or fowl and the eater none the wiser.

"I suppose that's pagan pot-luck," he said, glancing at it askant. "They have something like it in Christian lands; but such things are apt to be dubious. If you please, I'm partial to rice."

And having fairly scraped the bottom of the pan, with a sigh, which indicated a full stomach, he returned to the chimney corner, which was now as comfortable a place as any mortal need wish, the fire on one side having burned down to glowing embers, and the walls on the other giving out the genial warmth they had received from it when it leaped and roared up the broad chimney, as if eager to get out and wrestle with the storm.

Dropping his back in an angle of the wall, so that he could sleep sitting upright, he placed his revolvers in readiness on his knees.

"Good-night, my children!" he said to the Chinamen, who, huddled together on their shake-down like squirrels in a warren, were watching him with awe from their little bead-like eyes.

Then he closed his eyes, and was instantly asleep; yet so lightly that his ever-alert ears would detect the slightest portentous movement.

As the embers died into ashes and the light waned, the face seemed to grow sterner, until in the deepening gloom he looked like a sleeping lion.

So, gradually, the darkness shrouded all.

Then came to the sleeper a dream—a horrid nightmare of mad violence, the crash of riving timbers and falling walls, the yells of savage combatants, the rattle of firearms, and cries of wild terror.

From deep sleep he leaped erect into complete

wakefulness, no foggy bewilderment clogging his alert brain.

With a skillful kick he shot the last of the embers from their grave in the ashes across the room into the dried moss on which the coolies had coiled themselves together, like animals, to sleep.

Instantly the flames leaped up, and disclosed a scene which he had anticipated.

The door had been forced in by a mob of ruffians, who sought to spread terror by their yells and pistol-shots.

Shrieking with fear, the timid Celestials were scattered about the room, trying to creep out as their assailants rushed in.

But a defender for whom they were wholly unprepared swooped down upon the invaders.

There was a struggle as fierce as brief—a fall—then a figure rose, seemingly to gigantic proportions, so did their astonishment and his commanding presence magnify his real stature; and as the flames from the tow-like moss leaped up, flooding the hut with light, they saw their leader on the broad of his back, pinned to earth by a foot planted firmly on his breast and, towering above him, such a man as not one of their number could face without quailing.

In either grip frowned an iron dog-of-war, and his eyes seemed to dart flashes of fire, though his face was composed and even smiling—a hard, cruel, defiant smile.

"Who are you?" they gasped in dismay.

"TIGER DICK!"

The reply came with the sharp abruptness of a pistol-shot.

"And who are you? Speak quickly! We'll soon be smoked out of here. What are you going to do about it?" and with imperious nonbalance, Tiger Dick* held the balked robbers under his little battery. His smile was serene, but deadly!

"Boss, I reckon it's your trick," replied one of the men.

"Git, then!" was the ferse command.

"And leave me hyar to be murdered?" here interposed the prostrate leader. "Hold on, boys! This ain't the white article. He's a blarsted coward that'll go back on his mate when he's down."

"That's straight, Cap," responded one of the men, appealing to Tiger Dick. "I reckon you ain't no use fur—"

"Oh, no. His carcass is no good to me. It's his room I want."

And he removed his foot from the breast of his fallen enemy.

The ruffian arose and shook himself like a shaggy animal.

"I only stop to say, boss," he growled, "that the day may come when honors'll be easy betwixt us."

"All right. Meanwhile, unless you're waiting for me to throw you out—"

But he was not. He followed his men without further delay. And Tiger Dick leaped out of door close on the heels of the thwarted freebooters. It was not his cue to stay in where it was light, and let them shoot him with impunity from out in the darkness. No sooner had he passed the door than he was hidden from them, and so on an equal footing in all save numbers—and courage. The one more than counterbalanced the other.

The Chinamen bestirred themselves, and soon had their hut in safety. They had come off with the loss of a bed, which could easily be replaced. Indeed, it is probable that such a change was timely.

The invaders slunk off like whipped curs. Their discomfited leader burned to retrieve his honor by a return blow, but the men refused to sustain him, so he had to nurse his wrath while they trudged home through the mud, gainers in nothing but experience.

Satisfied that the Celestials would be left without further molestation, Tiger Dick returned.

They flocked about him chattering and jabbering their gratitude; but he stopped them, demanding another fire and more rice.

They tried to express their sense of obligation by placing before him enough for two men. But he proved himself as famous a trencherman as he was a fighter, leaving nothing to grow cold.

Again he composed himself for sleep in the chimney-corner, but now stretching at length on the hearth, since he had no occasion to fear treachery from his grateful entertainers, nor would they be likely to sleep, so as to fail to warn him of danger approaching from without.

The sun rose and made the complete arc of the heavens while he still slept on without break, showing that he must have been much worn with fatigue.

Just at sunset he started up, a new man, but as hungry as a wolf.

For the third time, the Chinamen placed food before him, and grinned to see him eat with unmistakable relish. Then he tossed some money to their leader and strode from the hut, to betake himself to the mining-camp which had been his destination the night before.

* See DIME LIBRARY Numbers 29, 171.

It was late when he approached the outskirts of the camp; and, before he was himself discovered, he detected the approach of a man through the darkness.

Stopping in the shadow of a rock, he waited for the stranger to pass on; but, instead, the latter turned the angle of the rock, and stopped directly before him, so close, indeed, that his body almost touched that of the Tiger.

Dick never lost his wits; nor was he inapt at interpreting the actions of others.

The slightest movement on the part of the stranger might betray his presence, but prepared for the discovery if it came, he was in no hurry to precipitate it. He had detected at once the furtiveness in the movements of the man, and knew that he was lying in wait for some one.

"A knock-down and a robbery—most likely," reflected the Tiger. "But I'll trump your ace for you this time, my fine fellow!"

Himself standing in the dense blackness, Tiger Dick could faintly discern the outlines of the man who stood so close before him—just enough to see that he drew no weapon, but stood in readiness to spring upon and clutch some one with his empty hands. Therefore it was safe to wait until he had made his spring. If the other proved equal to the emergency, the Tiger would not interfere at all. He never expended unnecessary force.

If the waylayer succeeded, the Tiger would step in at the last moment, and free his victim.

Dick relished the theatrical effect of a coup just when everything seemed "lovely."

He had not long to wait before he heard cautiously approaching footsteps.

A shadowy figure turned the angle of rocks. It was a woman!

In a breath she was swooped down upon by the ruffian who had ambushed her approach.

She had not time to cry out nor to struggle. Her mouth was stopped, and her slim figure plucked up from the ground.

As coolly as if pulling out his watch to learn the time of day, Tiger Dick drew a revolver from his pocket, and noiselessly raised the hammer.

He had but to extend his arm, to press the muzzle against the temple of the would-be abductor, with the challenge:

"Cheese it, cully! You've bit off more than you can chaw!"

CHAPTER II.

A "BAD" MAN.

A STARVING wretch, out at knees and elbows, and with a blunt pick and rusty pan his sole earthly possessions, kneeling in a wild mountain gulch, clutching a fragment of rock with frantic eagerness—devouring it with ravenous eyes, kissing it as a lover might kiss his sweetheart, and chuckling almost in imbecility.

A "stampede" for the new diggings, and a "city" arisen in the wilderness—a city of saloons, dance-houses and gambling dens; of canvas-roofed and muslin partitioned hotels; of clangling auction bells and thundering stamp-mills—"FOOL'S LUCK!"

And that jolly good fellow over yonder in the corner, who has just tipped his hat on the back of his head and indicated his wish by holding up three fingers with a nod and a smile, is what the "turn in his luck" has made of Capt. Jack Digby.

"How is that for a walk?" he asked, behind his hand, as Belle the Beautiful approached to fill his order, balancing her little tray on the tips of her fingers. "Hang me, if coming to the Bower ain't as good as a trip to the States! They don't often put 'em together like that—eh, 'quire?"

"H'm!" was the non-committal response of Eben Harkness, Esq., Attorney and Counselor at Law, whom the "boys" summed up thus oracularly: "Lies for any side that comes down with the biggest divvy!"

But burly and bushy whiskered Lige Bigelow, who sat at the end of the table, smote his thigh with his broad palm, and declared with emphasis:

"Them's my sentiments, boss, fur all day!"

And she was worth his enthusiasm or any man's. Although her hair was unmistakably red, it was such a red as you don't see every day, and, when she chose to let it down, hung to her knees in a great wavy mass of richness. Her face was perfectly free from the freckles that often mar a "sandy" complexion, and her eyes were as blue as sapphires, while her slim figure was as lissome as a wind-swayed willow.

So the boys had dubbed her Belle the Beautiful, and swore by her, every man Jack of them. And in her little realm she ruled them with unquestioned sway, for they knew that her authority was backed by all the available force of the camp.

As she turned from serving Captain Digby, she approached the next table, at which sat a miner, apparently sunk in drunken stupor, and threatening at every moment to lurch out of his seat and roll on the floor.

"Look hyer, Bill Rogers!" she said, shaking him vigorously by the shoulder. "You'll have to brace up, if you want to stay in hyer. The

Bower ain't a lodging-house, I'd have you know!"

"All right, Miss Belle—that's all right!" mumbled the miner, straightening the hat on his head, and leering at her with blinking eyes. "Give us a wisky."

"No you don't! You've had enough for tonight. But if you behave yourself you can stay where you are; if you don't, remember, it's—one, two, three, git!"

"Waal, give us a c'gar, then—give us a c'gar! That's all right, Miss Belle—eh? You know me. I'm a 'squar' man—ain't I now? I'm on my muscle for the Bower, outside, every time; an' I comes down with the rocks inside. That's er way to talk it!—eh, Miss Belle?"

"I ain't finding no fault. But a man's got to remember that he's a gentleman in this shebang," said the proprietress of the Bower, as she moved away to get the cigar ordered.

"You just let he has!" assented Mr. Rogers, assuming a blustering air, as if he held himself in readiness to enforce the law of decorum on call.

Then, drawing a handful of coin from his pocket, he sprawled it over the table with a drunken man's recklessness; and upon the return of his hostess said, smiling at her with inebriate good-nature:

"Help yerself, Miss Belle—help yerself!"

Selecting her due, Belle the Beautiful gathered up the rest and put it in her patron's hand, saying, with some show of not unkindly impatience:

"Don't be a fool, Rogers! You'd better keep the filthy in your pocket, if you don't want somebody that has sense enough not to get as drunk as you are to scoop it in."

"Thankee, Miss Belle—thankee! You're o' the good sort, you air. A man kin tie to you every time!" declared Rogers, fumbling for his pocket.

Then he proceeded to light his cigar, striking match after match, and chewing the weed all the while, until it was nearly half destroyed, when he succeeded in lighting it on one side.

And yet this man, who appeared to be so far gone in inebriation as to be oblivious to everything around him, was carefully drinking in every syllable that passed between Captain Jack Digby, his attorney, and his mine-boss.

At this moment the saloon door was thrust unceremoniously open by a man, who stalked across the room without looking to the right or to the left, and threw himself upon a bench, rapping imperiously on the table with the butt of his revolver.

He was dressed in a long, navy-blue military cloak, beneath which appeared heavy top-boots armed with spurs. His face was almost hidden by a broad brimmed black slouch hat, the shadow being deepened by his swarthy complexion and raven black hair and whiskers, the former falling to his shoulders, the latter lying upon his breast, as fine as a woman's hair.

From the midst of all this gloom peered eyes whose glances shot like lightning into the soul of any one who met them, never to be forgotten.

A year before this man had passed through a terrible ordeal, which had burnt all of the human tenderness out of his nature. From that day he had adopted the ruthless motto:

"Spare neither man, nor woman nor child!"

As the room rung with the rap of his pistol-but, an awed hush fell upon the noisy crowd. Every one was electrified. All felt that a master spirit had come among them.

Unused to being summoned so cavalierly, Belle the Beautiful turned with an ominous flash in her blue eyes; and all expected to see her sensitive pride blaze forth in a stinging reproof.

Just as she reached the stranger's side he faced about with a wrathful glare to see if his summons was being neglected, and his glance transfixed her.

She stopped dead still with a gasp and gazed at him helplessly, feeling weak and faint. Not that she recognized him. She had never seen him, nor his like, before, yet already she knew that he was to her as no other man ever had been, or ever could be.

His countenance did not change. Even the anger, which her beauty might have softened, did not yield. It was nothing to him that she was a woman, beautiful or otherwise.

Before a word could be uttered on either side, a cowboy, who had struck the camp that afternoon "on a big spree," and was now too drunk to heed anything save the impulses that seized him from moment to moment, staggered up to Belle, and swinging his hat above his head and cutting an absurd pigeon-wing, shouted:

"Whoop! I'm a Nevada nob, I am, an' you're a neat 'un, you are, an' blarst me ef I don't kiss yer—hic!"

And he pitched forward to seize her in his arms.

With an inarticulate cry of intense disgust, the girl started back, her hand seeking a little pearl-handled and gold-mounted revolver that lay hid in the folds of her dress.

But she was not left to champion her own cause.

Not knowing whence came the attack, the insolent cowboy felt himself seized, neck and

breech, and swung from his feet. Then came a crash of glass and he was sprawling in the mud out in the darkness.

The stranger had swooped down upon him like a whirlwind and buried him through a window.

Quietly reseating himself, he gave his order as if nothing had happened.

And dizzy and panting, Belle the Beautiful went to fill it.

"Boss," said Lige Bigelow, under his breath, "that's a bad man!—ye byear me!"

"Capt. Digby," said Eben Harkness in bland, oily accents, "that's the man you're looking for."

"You're mighty right," acquiesced Capt. Jack heartily. "He's our man, if we can get him, and with him on deck we'll knock 'em over like ten-pins."

Then as Belle the Beautiful turned from placing liquor before the stranger he signaled her.

"Say to that gentleman that we should like to join him at his table if agreeable to him, with a view to a business proposition," was his message.

Changing color and almost stammering with agitation Belle the Beautiful presented herself again before the man who thus far had given her not a second glance.

"Capt. Jack sends his compliments and requests the honor of joining you—"

"Who is Capt. Jack?" interrupted the stranger in sharp, metallic tones, almost roughly.

"Capt. Jack Digby runs the Little Lucky," replied Belle, not taking offense, as she would have done at such ungracious treatment from any other man. "He sits over yonder in the corner with that lawyer sharp and Lige Bigelow."

From his steady, penetrating regard of the woman who talked slang in soft, musical tones which would have graced any drawing-room, the impudent stranger shot a single lightning glance in the direction indicated, and said:

"Return my respects, and say that I shall deem it a privilege to entertain Capt. Digby and his friends. And, by the way, serve champagne for the party."

Impressed by his princely air, the girl retired to return piloting the representatives of the Little Lucky.

"Capt. Jack Digby, sir," she said with an air of embarrassment, remembering when it was too late that she had neglected to learn the stranger's name.

But Capt. Jack was not easily "thrown off his base," as he would have said.

"Glad to know you, sir!" he cried, extending his hand cordially. "What might I call you now?"

"Col. Despard Dangerfield," replied the other, meeting his breezy overtures with grave, almost freezing dignity. "It is a pleasure to place myself at your service."

"Don't mention it. The obligation is on the other side. Let me make known to you my friend and legal adviser—'Squire Harkness, of Frisco. And this byer's Lige Bigelow, mine-boss of the Little Lucky."

Eben Harkness's salutation was stiff, formal and guarded, while Lige Bigelow's was frank and awkward.

He paid involuntary homage to the eye that read him through and through.

Acknowledging the introductions with quiet self-possession, Despard Dangerfield added:

"Pray be seated, gentlemen."

As he took his place with off-hand assurance, Capt. Jack called out to Belle the Beautiful:

"The best you've got, my girl."

"The wine is ordered, sir," interposed Despard Dangerfield, politely.

"Sho, low! d'y'e think we come to sponge on ye?" cried the proprietor of the Little Lucky, turning upon him with the breezy directness which the son of the West catches from the open prairies and wind-swept mountain-tops.

"As your host," said Col. Dangerfield, with a quiet wave of the hand.

"But this is our circus!" protested the blunt mine-owner.

"You can return the compliment at some other time," rejoined the stranger; and though his tones were perfectly polite, they were veined with a decision that closed the matter.

Capt. Jack looked for a moment into the cold, steady eyes, and felt a sensation creeping over him that was entirely new.

Here was a man who, with a glance, arrested his attention and checked his happy-go-lucky flow of animal spirits.

In a much quieter tone the mine-owner said:

"Oh, well, if you insist—of course—"

And thus brokenly he yielded the point.

This little scene was witnessed by the other occupants of the saloon, and made a decided impression on the men.

But there was one who seemed too drunk to heed what was going on.

Bill Rogers struggled to his feet, stood balancing a moment and getting the line to the door, then, like a ship in a chopping sea, began tacking to windward.

He seemed to find it necessary to hold the doorway steady while he passed through it; but the moment he was out in the darkness all of

these signs of drunkenness vanished, and he ran at the top of his speed, until he burst into a shanty, where sat two men on opposite sides of a barrel which, standing on end, served as a table. It held a candle, stuck in its own grease, a bottle and two tumblers, a box of cigars and some papers.

"They've got the move on us, judge!" was his breathless announcement.

"The deuce!" ejaculated the elder and more intelligent of the men, into whose presence he had rushed. "What now?"

"A new man—and a perfect devil at that!"

"No! Who is he, and where did they get him?"

A hasty explanation put them in possession of all the facts, and then Wat Tigh, the companion of the man addressed as "judge," growled:

"You'll have to come to it. The easiest way's the best way—that's my motto."

To this the judge vouchsafed no reply; but rising with an irritated frown he said, pettishly:

"Come, let us see this man. He may not be such a terrible fellow, after all."

Out into the mist-mantled night they went, and soon their anxious faces were illuminated by the bar of light that streamed from a window of the Bower saloon, as they peered over the red curtain that obscured the lower half of the sash.

And so, like scowling demons, they glared in on the new man.

Despard had deadly foes before he had been in Fool's Luck half an hour.

CHAPTER III.

AN UNEXPECTED MOVE.

CAPTAIN JACK opened his business at once.

"May I ask, colonel, whether you are calcatin' to hang out permanent at Fool's Luck?"

"Well," replied Dangerfield, a little guardedly, "to tell you the truth, I have no very fixed plans."

"Prospecting? Looking for a promising investment, perhaps?"

"Well, not exactly."

"Druther go in on your own hook? A lone hand has its advantages, an' that's a fact."

"Look here, my friend," said Dangerfield, with a cool directness that was characteristic of the man, "perhaps we'll get on more smoothly if you begin by telling me the object of this cross-examination."

"Waal, Colonel Dangerfield, that's fair, as between man and man, and you a stranger. You must know, then, that you've struck Fool's Luck at a deuced hot time. There's got to something give way before the camp is much older, or the strain will bu'st her to flinders. There's a good man wanting here, and as I propose to keep ahead o' the game, I want the first bid for him."

"Now, the way you got your work in on that blatherskite from Nevada took my eye to a dot; and I thought that if you wasn't above giving me a lift, I might make it an object to you."

"Giving you a lift in what way?"

"Waal, the situation's just this: I run the Little Lucky, that's been booming from the word go. This country grows some pretty hard cheeks; but Frisco must hold over us than; fur that son of a gun, Judge Pettigrew, bails from the Golden Gate; and he'd discount the toughest old army jack that ever wagged ears."

"Thar ain't a clearer claim than the Little Lucky west of the watershed, nor east of it either, fur that matter; and yet he has had the gall to trump up a title based on some old Spanish grant—the barefacedest fraud that ever outraged and insulted an intelligent community!"

Captain Jack had been "on the stump," so that when he warmed on any subject, he was apt to run to spread-eagle. Now he launched forth in a round denunciation of Spanish claims; but he had hardly got fairly under way, when his eloquence was cut short by a challenging war-whoop; and all turned to see the cowboy so precipitately ejected through the window stalk in at the door in full battle array, a revolver in one hand and a bowie-knife in the other. However, a thorough coating of mud from head to heel, even to the covering of his face with a yellow mask, detracted somewhat from the dignity of his appearance.

"Whoop, hyar, ye snoozers!" he yelled, balancing himself unsteadily and leering around. "I'm Teddy the Teaser, I am—a Nevada nob, that's me! And I'm the boy what's goin' to clean out yer ole shebang, an' bu'st yer wide open! Ay? Hove me through the winder, did ye? Whoop! Come fur me! Hyer's whar ye git yer stomach-bitters!"

"You jest git!" cried a clear, sweet, ringing voice; and Teddy the Teaser looked straight down the bore of a little gold-mounted revolver—a "pea-popper."

Despard Dangerfield turned his head and saw a long, shapely arm extended straight from the shoulder, a gracefully-poised head thrown defiantly back, and blue eyes flashing fire. He made up his mind at a glance that the girl was thoroughly competent to manage the belligerent

Teddy, and gave his attention again to Captain Jack, as coolly as if she were a man, and so expected to fight her own battles.

The Teaser capitulated at once.

"Yes, ma'am!—jest so, ma'am!—it's your say, ma'am! I'll step down and out, ef so be—"

And, keeping his eyes fixed on the menacing muzzle, he backed out of the door, smiling and bowing to conciliate the backer of the little bull-dog."

And while he slid so gracefully out of the situation, Belle the Beautiful caught sight of the men peering in through the window at Iron Despard; and a sudden spasm of deadly fear shot to her heart.

"Judge Pettigrew!" she gasped, under her breath, and turning quickly, before he should look her way and discover that he was observed, she called a dissipated-looking youth, just between boyhood and manhood, and put him in charge of the bar; then went into a back room, and so slipped out into the night.

Meanwhile, Iron Despard returned to business.

"So this Pettigrew proposes to oust you?"

"Not much he don't! I'd like to see him try on that leetle game!" cried Captain Jack, pugnaciously.

"Then what is his claim?"

"Why, he's sunk the Pretty Polly!"

"That's his darter!" interrupted Lige Bigelow, smacking his lips with great gusto. "Ye hain't seen Folly Pettigrew? Waal, stranger, ye hain't ready to die yet! Git a day off, an' take her in. She's wo'th it! Not the style o' Belle the Beautiful hyar; but, ob, my! scrape me off with a chip!—peaches an' cream!—kittens, an' angels, an'—an'—an' sick!"

"Oh, cheese it, Lige! don't be a blame fool!" cried Captain Jack. "Ef you think she's so doggone fine, you'd better throw up your job, an' go over to the enemy."

"Hold hard, pardner!" responded honest Lige. "The gal's the gal; but I ain't takin' no stock in her ole man, ye understand."

Another man might have smiled at this quaint altercation between the mine-boss and his principal; but Colonel Dangerfield, in view of the subject of it, frowned with the bitter reflection:

"Trust a woman to be at the bottom of every bit of devilment, one way or another."

Aloud he picked up the disjointed narrative.

"Judge Pettigrew sunk his shaft on your claim?"

"I'd a' bored him quicker, if he bad! No, sir! But he got as nigh us as he dast to, and overlapped our claim with his'n. Now he's blastin' toward us, threatenin' to cut off a vein that we're followin'; and hang me, if I don't blow him and his gang to thunder, if I get a whack at 'em under ground!"

"There's a legal way of adjusting these disputes," suggested Eben Harkness, blandly; "and I hold for moderate counsels."

"That's all right!" cried Captain Jack, excitedly. "But while we was palaverin', they'd be stuffin' both pockets with quartz! Book law is all right in Frisco; but pistol law knocks the socks off of it in the mountains. Now, what we want is a man with a head on him and blood in his eye, to organize a gang that'll clean out Pettigrew and his crowd. And, colonel, you're the man for my money, if you'll take the job. This thing ain't all going off in wind. There's going to be hard knocks, and blood spilt, too."

"Eh! What the deuce now?"

For, without a sign of warning, Colonel Dangerfield had vaulted through the window, which he had cleared of sash and glass a little while before, with Teddy the Teaser's body.

CHAPTER IV.

THE FIRST PISTOL SHOT.

So engrossed was the judge in his examination of the new man that he did not notice Belle the Beautiful's momentary appearance at the door.

"Just my luck!" he fumed. "Hang it all! if there are any plums dropping, they're sure to fall into his mouth! That man's worth a little army by himself. What an eye he has! And he's just the style of a man to carry the boys with him with a whoop and hurrah. That one act will make a hero of him. Wat, we've got to put a quietus on that fellow, one way or another, or he'll blow us out of water, if he takes the other side."

Wat Tigh had been a bruiser, and, said rumor, had killed his man in the ring, under circumstances that compelled him to fly the States and seek refuge beyond the reach of the arm of the law.

"H'm! we're havin' dark nights," he growled, significantly. "A tap on the head, and—good-by, John!"

"No no! that won't do! You're always for violence," objected Judge Pettigrew, testily.

"It'll be worse'n that, if it comes to a scrimmage under ground," was Wat's defense.

"But that will be more—regular at least in appearance," persisted the judge. "They can't say anything ugly against a fair fight; but this night-work smells a leetle too strong of hemp."

"You're too thunderin' dainty to make head in this bloomin' country!" growled Wat.

"Maybe you know lots o' easy ways to shut off the crow of that rooster!"

"We'll think of it—we'll think of it," snapped the judge.

"There ought to be money enough in the thing to stand him a little somethin' handsome," suggested Bill Rogers.

Wat made a contemptuous sound with his mouth.

"You ain't buyin' up his kind every day, I'll bet you a hatful of rocks," he said. "Ef he hires out to Cap. Jack, he's Cap. Jack's man all the while—you may pile yer chip on that."

"We've got to fix him some way!" repeated Jude Pettigrew, as if annoyed at the perplexity in which he found himself.

"You'll find him a bad man to handle, said Bill Rogers. "Ef you'd seen him pile that snoozer through the window—"

"Who piled me through the winder?" demanded a voice in their rear.

All turned.

Teddy the Teaser was regarding them with drunken interest.

He took off his hat and made them a very marked though ill-balanced bow.

"I'm Teddy the Teaser, I am," he said—"a Nevada nob. I'll be obliged to ye, gentlemen, ef you'll tell me who chucked me through the winder."

Judge Pettigrew eyed the new-comer suspiciously and with annoyance.

Wat Tigh plucked his principal's sleeve.

"Now's our chance!" he whispered, eagerly. "Ef this galoot calls him home, the boys can't come back on us for it; and ef so he goes in lemons and comes out squeezed, we ain't nothin' in o' pocket."

And Judge Pettigrew, with murder in his heart, though his hands were clean, pointed through the saloon window, and said:

"Do you see that man in a cloak?"

"That army rooster?"

"That's the man who threw you through the window!"

Teddy the Teaser gazed with dull ferocity in his eyes, and, nodding his head, repeated slowly:

"That rooster!—that rooster! Um-h'm, um-h'm!"

Turning to the judge, he said:

"I'm obliged to ye, gentlemen. I'm Teddy the Teaser, when you want a clever turn. You'll always find me whar thar's whisky an' fun fur the boys. I'm obliged to ye—yours truly—Teddy the Teaser!"

Then he turned his bleared eyes into the saloon once more.

"Hove me through the winder, did hel—that snoozer! Um-h'm! um-h'm!"

He rubbed the blood from his forehead, and snapped it from his finger with a flirt.

"Hove me through the winder," he repeated—"that snoozer! I've got him spotted."

Then once more to Judge Pettigrew and his party:

"Yours truly, Teddy the Teaser!"

And turning, he slouched away into the murky night, and disappeared in the darkness.

They gazed after him until he was gone, and so missed a sight which might have put them on their guard.

It was a girl with her hand pressed to her heart, also gazing after the retreating cowboy. In her agitation she allowed herself to come for a moment into the line of light. Then, discovering her imprudence, she shrunk back again into the dense shadow.

"Judge," said Wat Tigh, with a murderer's chuckle, "considerin' what it cost, that thar wa'n't a bad investment. I reckon we'll hear from Teddy the Teaser one o' these fine mornin's!"

"Keep your thoughts to yourself!" was the judge's ungracious reply.

Wat chuckled contentedly.

"That's all right," he said.

"What are they talking about so busily, I wonder?" queried Judge Pettigrew, testily.

"Layin' the wires, to touch off a mine under us an' blow us to thunder," suggested Wat.

"Couldn't you get under that window, and pick up some of their points?" Pettigrew asked Bill Rogers.

"Beggin' your pardon, judge," returned that worthy, "I feel purty comfortable with whole bones in my skin."

"What has that to do with it?"

"A good deal, you'd think, I reckon, ef that chap happened to drop onto some one cuttin' the dirt from under him in that way."

"Bah!" growled Wat Tigh.

"Mavbe you'd like to try it yourself," suggested Rogers.

Tigh cast a contemptuous leer at his cautious comrade, and for answer moved away in the direction of the window.

His eyes were still purblind from gazing into the lighted saloon; and he did not see a shadow which flitted hurriedly away.

"He'll git his fill—you hear me!" prophesied Rogers, with a shake of the head.

"Go slow, Wat," Judge Pettigrew called after him, guardedly. "It won't do to have them drop on us in that fix."

"I'm runnin' this hyar!" growled Wat.

Cautiously he crept forward along the side of the house. The eaves dripped upon him, and made him swear internally. The mud would make a sucking sound, as he withdrew his feet, in spite of his greatest caution.

By the time he got nicely ensconced under the window, where he could hear what was said within, he was ready to explode with suppressed wrath.

The light streaming out into the fog just over his head faintly illuminated his ferocious upturned face.

Just at that moment a handful of mud came from out the darkness and struck him fairly in one eye.

He could not repress a savage oath.

The window was momentarily obscured; a form shot through, and alighted upon the eaves-dropper.

A fierce struggle followed.

Wat Tigh swore wildly.

His opponent was as silent as death.

Capt. Jack and his party thrust their heads out of the window; and with ejaculations of excitement the crowd in the saloon thronged at their backs.

There were loud oaths exchanged and threats banded from one to another; for there were Pettigrew men in the room; and as Col. Dangerfield was now set down for the Little Lucky, any demonstration on his part must be against one of the Pretty Polly crowd. A little thing would start a free fight on the spot.

Out of doors in the darkness Wat Tigh struggled to draw a revolver; but a hand of steel gripped his wrist, and a twist that nearly dislocated his arm dispossessed him of the weapon. Then as he struggled to his feet, his throat was clutched, and he was pressed irresistibly backward.

Capt. Jack and his party started back; and the next instant the head and shoulders of the discomfited eavesdropper were pressed across the window-sill, so that the light could fall upon his face.

It was bloated and purple with strangulation, where it was not hidden beneath a tangle of black whiskers. Its eyes glared bloodshot with futile rage.

"Who is this fellow?" asked Col. Dangerfield, in as low and even a tone as he could command after his severe struggle, and with his muscles still at their highest tension.

"Wat Tigh!" shouted several of the Little Lucky men at a breath.

"Curse you!" gasped the choking ruffian, and writhing like a serpent beneath a crushing heel, he slipped from the sill; and both men disappeared again beneath the window.

At that moment a pistol-shot rung out on the night.

Iron Despard rose again into the bar of light streaming through the window, lifted his hand to his head, reeled and fell.

A piercing shriek—a woman's voice—cut the darkness like a knife.

It thrilled to the heart of every auditor, and a deathlike hush fell upon the crowd, every one being arrested in the attitude of the moment.

The next sound was a shrill whistle.

Then came the sound of rapidly retreating footsteps through the mud.

It broke the spell. Pandemonium reigned. There was a wild struggle for the door.

CHAPTER V.

SMALL THANKS.

IT is needless to tell the reader that it was Belle the Beautiful who threw the clod of mud which caused Wat Tigh to betray himself.

Absorbed in the struggle which followed, she did not see whether it was Judge Pettigrew or Bill Rogers who fired the shot that released their comrade; indeed, for all she knew to the contrary, it might have been Teddy the Teaser, thus early seeking his revenge.

The rough miners rushed pell-mell from the saloon, and crowded around, forming a circle of eager faces above the girl and the fallen man.

"Is he dead?"

"Whar's he hit?"

"Hold a light! Thunderin' Mars! it's darker'n a main shaft out byar."

"Look-a hyar, gents, thar's too many heads in the way."

"Stand back!"

"Give the man air!"

Everybody appealed to everybody else, readier with precept than with example.

By this time Captain Jack appeared on the scene, shouldering his way through the crowd, and crying authoritatively:

"Make way, boys! Come! come! give us elbow-room!"

They complied, with a great deal of pushing and profanity.

A candle was brought to the window from the inside.

While Captain Jack bent over the fallen man to examine his hurts by its light, there was a great deal of loud talk, to the effect that it was a "doggoned shame" that so good a man should be "laid on the shelf," and low, rumbling menaces against the Pretty Polly party, who, having "opened the ball in this slashin' style,"

should "git all they called for" before they got through with it.

Oblivious to this talk, Belle the Beautiful, with difficulty repressing her tears, appealed to Captain Jack:

"Can't we get him into the house? He'll get his death out here in the wet, if he isn't already done for."

"Git a plank, boys!"

"A plank's wanted!"

"Pass a plank this way!"

Half a dozen eager voices took up the cry in various forms, and as many started to secure the impromptu stretcher while one at Captain Jack's elbow bent with the earnest inquiry:

"What's the prospect, Cap?"

But a cry from Belle the Beautiful intercepted Captain Jack's expression of opinion.

Despard the Duelist opened his dark eyes full upon the girl's anxious and pain-drawn face. He was a man who gathered his wits quickly. He realized the situation at once.

To awake and find his head on the arm of so beautiful a woman, to see the transition from distress to joyous relief which lighted her face at his recovery, would have thrilled any other man. If it had such an effect on Despard Dangerfield, he betrayed the fact by neither look nor word.

Rising without a second glance at the girl, but, instead, giving his hand to Captain Jack to be assisted to his feet, he said, quietly:

"Gentlemen, I think we shall have no need of a plank just yet."

A cheer greeted this speech. It showed that the speaker was still "game," and the boys liked pluck "every time!"

"By thunder! we ain't down yet!" shouted an enthusiastic Little Lucky man.

Then everybody was eager to help the hero into the house; but he walked by himself, only resting a hand on Captain Jack's shoulder.

Meanwhile, Belle the Beautiful lipped away, entering the back part of the house. In the excitement over the "new man" she was forgotten. Whatever her thoughts or feelings, no one was near to pry into them. If she cried some over his indifference, no one suspected it when not long after she quietly took up her post again at the bar, her soiled dress changed for a clean one.

The miners who surrounded Despard Dangerfield were Little Lucky men. Those of the opposite party held aloof, hanging about the door, on the alert for any act of retaliation.

This was loudly and with many blustering oaths recommended by the injured party.

"Say the word, colonel," they declared, "an' we'll wade in and clean out the hull pesky crowd!"

But Colonel Dangerfield said coldly:

"Thank you, gentlemen; but I always fight my own battles, in my own time and way. Understand this is a personal matter."

When the wound on the side of his head had been dressed and his clothes made passably presentable, Colonel Dangerfield said quietly:

"And now, Captain Digby, we will resume business, if you please."

Everything was soon satisfactorily arranged, Despard Dangerfield being installed as commander-in-chief of the Little Lucky forces, if it came to open war.

He was introduced to the men in that capacity by the well-satisfied Captain Jack, and the room rang again with their cheers. Then "all hands" drank at Captain Jack's expense.

That night when he had left the Bower, Despard Dangerfield was stopped by the appearance of a shadowy form in his path.

A woman's voice checked his hand on its way to a revolver. It was Belle the Beautiful.

"Well, my girl, what do you want?" he asked abruptly.

A sob swelled in Belle's throat. Why need he be so harsh with her?

"I beg your pardon," she began, with a humility all out of keeping with her usual treatment of men. "I came to warn you—"

"Of what?"

As if annoyed by the slight hesitancy in her manner, he caught her up short, sharp and stern.

"Judge Pettigrew is going to make a dead-set against you," she said. "I heard him and Wat Tigh talking it over as soon as he got wind of your standing in with Captain Jack. Wat

was ready to lay for you in the dark before you handled him so roughly; and now there ain't anything he'd stop at to get square. He's the hardest man in Fool's Luck, and the worst to get away with, too. He's held his fivers up in the ring, they say, in the States, and he's on the shoot all the time. He's never got such a round-ing-up as you gave him, since he's been in the camp, and he'll never let up on you till he throws you cold, if you don't cook his goose for him first—take my word for it."

Judge Pettigrew wouldn't hear to any night-work; but it's more because he don't want to scrape acquaintance with Judge Lynch than anything else. He said as much. But he's down on you bad; for there's money in this thing—millions of it. If he gets you in a hole, look out—he'll do you for all you're worth. He

only wants the thing straight, and that ain't much in this country. If you crowd him too hard, he may stretch a point, and put somebody after you with a slug or eight inches of cold steel. You'll know he's up to it, when I tell you he helped Teddy the Teaser (as he calls himself) to spot you.

"That's another man you'll want to mark down pretty fine. He had an ugly look when the judge told him that you was the party that bounced him. He took your measure as if he meant business; and he hasn't the points of a man that forgets easy, or I lose my guess."

She hesitated just a moment, with palpable embarrassment, and then went on hurriedly:

"You won't take it amiss that I put you up to this? It isn't that I think you want any points of them in a fair fight; but I thought it only the square thing that you should be put on the lookout for them to come at you from behind a shanty, some dark night."

During this hurried speech Despard Dangerfield had stood stock-still, regarding the girl fixedly, in silence.

He was wondering to hear her talk the slang of the rough with such an air of womanly refinement. And she seemed so totally unconscious of the impropriety of her speech. Had all her life been spent among these ruffians, in whose mouths the English language becomes an almost unintelligible jargon?

When she came to a rather abrupt pause he replied, with the same repellent ungraciousness that had characterized him from the first:

"I suppose I ought to thank you for your interest in my behalf, inasmuch as you are a woman; but in the future do not trouble yourself about my safety. If there is nothing more you wish to say I will bid you good-night."

She looked at him for a moment through the darkness, in silence.

Was this the return for her solicitude?

Then, with something of her wonted haughty air when moved to displeasure, she withdrew from his path, and said, in constrained, hurt tones, which her pride in vain strove to make steady and cold:

"No, I have nothing more to say."

With a mere inclination of his head he passed her and strode away into the darkness.

She stood gazing in the direction he had gone, even after he had disappeared and the sound of his footsteps had died away.

Slowly the tears gathered in her eyes, hung heavy on her long, curved lashes, and coursed one by one down her cheeks.

She was roused from this painful reverie by a rude clutch on her arm and a harsh voice hissing:

"So ye're gallivantin' around after the new man, are ye?"

CHAPTER VI.

HANDS UP.

ALBEIT a woman, Belle the Beautiful had led too adventuresome a life not to be different from the most of her sex. She had more self-reliance and greater presence of mind.

Instead of screaming, as might have been expected, she executed a swift, eel-like movement that freed her from the grip of her assailant.

A single bound took her to a distance where she felt secure to confront him.

"Mind your own business, Wat Tigh!" she said boldly.

"Yes, and yours too, my beauty!" growled the man.

"No, you'll not interfere with me. I'm nothing to you."

"The blazes you ain't. Waal, we'll see about that."

Then with sudden anger, as he recalled what he had overheard her say:

"So I'm the worst pill in the box, am I? And I'll lay my life it was you that clouted me with mud!"

With a savage oath he advanced upon her menacingly, but instead of beating a retreat, as he more than likely expected, and probably wished, the girl stood her ground and threw up her arm on a line with her shoulder.

The motion was so suggestive that it was not necessary to warn him in words that her hand held a cocked revolver, and he appreciated the value of a whole skin sufficiently to halt before it was too late.

"Wat Tigh, you know me!" she said, in hard, metallic tones.

"Would you murder me?" asked the man, plainly daunted by her determined attitude.

"I won't stand any of your foolishness," she replied.

"No!" he sneered; "but you'd lay down and let that flash rooster walk over ye!"

"It's none of your business whether I would or not."

"I heard yer whinin'," he continued, tauntingly.

"You're sneak enough for anything," was her angry retort.

"Take that pistol off of me!"

"I don't know but it would be better to lay you out now before you've done any more mischief. The boys would see me through, and it

would only be taking the thing out of the hands of Judge Lynch sooner or later."

"Bah! It's that new mash of yours that you're lookin' out fur. But who'd think fur a bird of his feather to bide behind a petticoat?"

"Don't worry about him. He's twice the man you are, as you may learn one of these fine days. But I'd hate to dirty my hands on such a ruffian as you."

She had put up her weapon, and now turned to leave him. Secretly she had talked to him thus long, in order to give Despard Dangerfield opportunity to get beyond the danger of being followed.

"One word before ye go," he interposed. "You're not to make or meddle in this matter any more, ye understand. Reme ber, I've warned ye, and if ye go ag'in' my word, it's your own look-out. You're a woman, but you kin do a man's mischief, and more, so you'll git a man's dose."

"Most likely—from such a coward as you!" was her parting shot.

But as soon as she had got out of his sight, she turned and crept back, to see if he tried to follow C. I. Dangerfield.

He detected her pursuit, and there rose a devil's debate in his dark breast.

"She's doggin' me, to see if I'm after him," he growled. "She come down, wi' hout a kick, the minute he set his peepers on her, curse him! But is he to walk away from me like that? I could bag her now, an' none the wiser, an' the metal's whar I kin put my hands on it any minute! Twenty thousand! The silks an' satins that 'ud buy ought to wilt her. But, if she stood out ag'in' it—waal, when I tired of her nonsense, there's many a hole in the Rockies that wouldn't give it away who dropped her in, an' I could buy her betters in Frisco any day."

"Will I do it, or won't I?" he asked himself. "This is the spot, an' thar'll never be such another time."

He was right. The girl had followed him to a most desolate spot, and the night was so dark that you could hardly see your hand before your face.

He passed round an angle of rock, he stopped abruptly, and there crouched, like a beast of prey ready for the fatal spring.

His eyes glared, his teeth were set, his fingers worked like talons.

"Come on!" he growled. "I'll have ye, if it costs my life!"

And she came, with every sense on the alert, as the timid gazelle advances to the flag of the tiger.

A spring, and she was in his clutch, his broad palm closing her mouth. Struggle as she might, she was powerless.

"Now, by all the furies!" he growled, with a savage chuckle; and lifting his victim clear of the ground, he turned to fly with her.

But before he could take a step he felt the cold muzzle of a revolver pressed to his temple, and a voice out of the pitch-darkness said coolly:

"Cheese it, cully! You've bit off more than you can chaw!"

The unexpectedness alone of this interruption must have made it startling; but there was, besides, a cool, sneering nonchalance in Tiger Dick's voice that had thrilled more than one man with the conviction that his life was held at not a feather's weight by the gentlemanly bravo.

Wat Tigh recognized it as the same voice he had heard twenty-four hours before; and with an oath of dismay, he involuntarily dropped his intended victim.

Belle the Beautiful was only a woman, though an unusually plucky one. She had found herself so utterly helpless in the grip of the brawny villain, that she was completely panic-stricken, and the instant she felt herself released she sped away into the darkness like a startled fawn.

"Hands up!" was the Tiger's cool command. "You're the kind of a fellow that it's as well to have give an account of himself, I take it."

"Boss," began Wat, taking care, however, to render immediate compliance to the injunction laid upon him; but Tiger Dick interrupted in tones that cut off any appeal:

"About face! March!"

Few men dared falter before such a commander. Holding his hands above his head, Wat Tigh turned in the direction of the camp, and heard the footfalls of his captor keep pace with his close in his rear.

It was characteristic of Tiger Dick to return his pistol to his pocket as soon as he had removed it from Wat's head, where another man might have continued to carry it in his hand. This was the secret of his great power over men. He always seemed so perfectly at his ease. He never made a parade of force; and so, knowing that it lay in ambush back of his smiling confidence, the imaginations of the rude fellows with whom he had to deal magnified what they could not see and measure, until it seemed utterly hopeless for any odds to try to cope with him.

Thus captor and captive marched in silence until, reaching the Bower, Wat stopped, objecting:

"Hold on, boss! I don't want to go in hyar."

"It's not what *you* want, but what *I* want, my dear fellow. This place suits me very well, as it seems to be the best-kept in the camp."

"But the heifer you euchered me out of hangs out hyar, an' I reckon—"

"So much the better. She'll naturally want to know you when she sees you again."

"Ef so be—"

"March!"

Again the cool inexorableness that would not tolerate debate.

Cursing his luck, Wat Tigh walked into the saloon, the elevation of his hands showing at once to all that he was a prisoner.

A murmur went round the room. Glasses were set down untasted; cigars waited unlighted while matches burned out; half-played hands of cards were laid face-downward on the table, while drinkers, smokers and players stared in wonder and expectancy.

Had the new man already captured his foe and brought him back for punishment to the spot which had witnessed their struggle, and the latter's partial triumph, through treachery?

But Wat was followed by a man whom none had seen before, a man who walked so quietly with his hands in his pockets, that every one concluded he had nothing to do with the fighting man of the Pretty Polly, and looked beyond him for some one else in more warlike array.

Belle the Beautiful, still pale and trembling, stood behind her bar. She looked from Wat to the stranger expectantly.

The latter walked to a table and sat down with every appearance of unconcern. He looked at Wat and then at the other occupants of the room, as if the situation were unintelligible to him.

Wat "dropped to the racket" at once. He had been brought there merely to be humiliated. Tiger Dick was ignoring all connection with him!

A black scowl of fury darkened his face, as he lowered his hands and slunk out of the room. He had not the address to try to cover the ignominy of his entrance, by boldly stepping up to the bar and ordering liquor, as if he had come in for that purpose.

In his heart he imagined himself murdering his tormentor, and hacking him into inch pieces. But it stopped in imagination. He was completely cowed, and would not have dared to shoot at the Tiger's back!

Belle the Beautiful also took in the situation, only one link of which was wanting to make it perfectly comprehensible to all, and went to her customer with a flush on her cheek, but now so pale.

He looked at her with no sign of recognition, ordering wine quietly; and she hoped that he did not know that she was the recipient of his service.

In polished, gentlemanly phrase he asked her where he could find accommodations for the night.

She directed him to the best hotel in the place—a canvas-roofed caravansera, which made up in charges what it lacked in comfort.

Having drank, he once more went out into the night, walking carelessly with his hands in his pockets.

In the open street, he was met by two men, one of whom said:

"Boss, you're the man we're lookin' fur."

Tiger Dick stopped at once. If he was prepared to repel any assault from them, nothing in his outward appearance betrayed the fact.

CHAPTER VII.

TIGER DICK "CORRALED."

JUDGE PETTIGREW was a man in whom knavery was held in check only by the fear of disgrace. But, nervous and irritable, he was often hurried into impulsive action; so now his hand had fired the pistol before which Iron Despard went down as if to death.

The instant the deed was done he was unnerved by a vision of a tree; a running noose, and a hooting mob, *Judge Lynch's court!*

"Good God!" he cried, and the weapon dropped from his quaking hand.

His ears were filled by a ringing sound, so that a voice just at his elbow sounded as if it came from a distance.

"That was plumb center, gov'nor! You've cut his comb fur 'im, fur rocks!"

In bewilderment the would-be murderer turned toward Bill Rogers, who at that instant put his fingers to his mouth and blew a shrill whistle.

"Come! we'll have to mosy out o' this," declared that worthy. "Look! they're swarmin' out o' thar, like flies about a molasses hogshead. It won't be healthy to have 'em ketch us prowlin' around out hyar."

Then, seeing that his principal did not stir, Rogers thrust his face forward close to that of the judge, peering in wonder at the ghastly countenance dimly illuminated by the light from the saloon windows.

"Moses in the bulrushes! what's got into the man?" he cried.

Then, clutching him by the arm and forcibly dragging him away, he went on:

"Air ye waitin' fur a hemp necktie? Ye'll git it, ef them galoots claps their hooks onto ye!"

"Hemp! Necktie!" gasped Judge Pettigrew.

Then a sudden panic seized him, and breaking from his follower, he sped away like a frightened hare.

"Waal, I sw'ar!" was Rogers's surprised ejaculation. "The judge has legs when he wants to use 'em; an' that's a fact!"

Following as fast as he could, his principal distanced him; and when he reached the office of the Pretty Polly mine, he found the door locked, though light glimmering through chinks in the shanty wall showed that the mine-owner had returned.

It was some time before his guarded appeal gained him admittance; and then the door was opened only wide enough to permit him to slide in, the judge standing out of sight behind the barrier.

It was shut the instant he had passed through; and to his dismay he found him-self confronted by a man who, with the blazing eyes and white drawn face of a maniac, stood with his back against the door, as if to contest his exit, and pointed a cocked pistol full at his head!

"Hands up! Down on your knees, you traitor!" hissed the seemingly frantic judge.

"For the love o' God!" gasped the astonished subordinate. "What have I done?"

"You'll betray me, will you?" cried the mine-owner, ignoring the other's appeal. "Down on your knees, I say, and swear by the mother that bore you—by your hopes of heav—"

But he stopped abruptly with a shudder.

Rogers was already on his knees, with the craven's bloodless lips and quailing eye.

"Don't shoot, gov'nor,—don't!" he pleaded, lifting his shaking hands. "Did I ever go back on a pal? Didn't I snake you out o' thar; when you'd have waited fur 'em to walk up an' knock you over with a stick? Why should I play it so low down, when you've always treated me white? I tell ye, you kin tie to me, boss. I'm as close as an oyster."

Not as if assured by the protestations of the wretch who cowered before him, but rather as if he heard only the voices of the furies that filled his guilty soul with fear, Judge Pettigrew abruptly changed from menace to pleading.

"Bill, do you think they're after me?" he asked, drawing close, as if for protection, to the man whose life he had just threatened.

"O' course not!" was Bill's positive assurance.

"How should they know who done it? It's as black as yer hat out; an' nobody seen you but me."

"That is true!" assented the judge; and again he drew away, and into his eyes returned the glare of hatred and suspicion. "You—only you hold me at your mercy!"

"Hold on, gov'nor!" hastily interposed Rogers.

But as a precaution, he whipped out his own revolver and "held the drop" on his man in turn.

Judge Pettigrew shrank back against the shanty wall, like an animal at bay.

"Shoot!" he said, while you have the chance. "It's your life or mine! I will never make terms with you. I would rather die so, than drag out a life of harrowing uncertainty, the slave of such a wretch as you!"

"Hold on, gov'nor," repeated Rogers. "I hadn't nothin' ag'in' you that I should go fur to throw you cold, only to save my own bacon. I don't stand with my hands in my pockets an' let no man put daylight through me, ye understand; but let up on me, an' I'm yer solid friend through thick an' through thin. Don't I stand in with ye, in this thing? How could I shake you without gittin' left myself? The boys ain't overly sweet on me, at the best. Can't you see that it's worth more to me to stand by you than to sell you out?"

It seemed gradually to grow into Judge Pettigrew's comprehension that this was so. He sunk into a rude seat, made of a lemon box one end of which had been knocked out and the slat sides rounded into the form of a chair-back by nailing them to a segment of a barrel hoop; and folding his arms on the head of the barrel which held the candle, he dropped his face upon them, and so sat, a prey not to remorse, but to guilty fear.

"Come! come! brace up, judge!" urged Rogers, advancing and proffering his whisky-flask. "A nip o' this hyar'll put things in a different light."

Judge Pettigrew caught at the suggestion. Lifting his livid face and blood-shot eyes, he said, gratefully:—

"You're a good fellow, Rogers. Don't think it's death that I fear, but to have those hounds drag me through the street like a dog!"

And he drank several deep draughts of the fiery liquid.

"Don't you worry. The thing ain't done yet!" said Rogers, reassuringly.

"Go and see how things have turned out. And, Rogers, I won't forget any service you render me."

"Oh, that's all right, boss."

But Rogers nevertheless went away with a comfortable sense that "there was money in it."

And the man he left behind paced the confined space of the shanty with that restlessness often displayed by a caged beast of prey.

"I'll never be taken alive, so help me God!" he muttered, hoarsely, and left off wringing his hands, to draw a revolver, and examine its loading.

Every pore oozed with icy sweat, that stood in glistening beads on his forehead. At every sound he started and listened, his eyes rolling with an alert, hunted restlessness, while his grip tightened on his revolver, and his bloodless lips stopped their muttering and stood apart with bated breath.

When footsteps approached, he stood at bay in the middle of the room, with his weapon cocked in readiness. When they passed on, and he knew that it was only some miner reeling home to his dug-out, he breathed again with the labored pants of a wretch who is respite from the strain of the rack.

After what seemed hours of this torture, he was electrified by sounds of some one approaching at a rapid pace.

"At last! at last!" he gasped, and his face became terrible in its despair and demoniac fury.

"Judge! judge! let me in!" was the guarded summons, as the wooden latch of the door was cautiously rattled, betraying the impatience of him without.

Again Rogers was permitted to glide through and the door hastily secured so that none other might follow.

"Well?" demanded the mine-owner.

"Waal, judge, it's all right!"

"All right?"

"We've had a big skeer fur nuthin'."

"Speak out! What have you to tell?"

"The galoot is alive an' kickin'."

"Alive!"

And with hands that shook even more violently than in his fear, Judge Pettigrew grasped his satellite's "bunch o' fingers."

"Alive!" he repeated, as if dazed with the relief this announcement gave him.

"As wide awake as you or me—"

"Thank God!"

Plainly the ejaculation burst from the depths of his heart; and now overcome by the reaction, he once more sunk into the lemon-box seat.

"Tell me all about it," he said, huskily. "Why have you been such an age? You have kept me in hell all this time."

"Waal, judge," exclaimed Rogers, "I couldn't sober up all to once, ye know; I had to keep up the old racket. So all I could do was to hang around and keep my ears open. The Bower was cleared out mostly, them that was left bein' too drunk to chin it to much account. But bimeby a hull raft o' Little Luckyites waltzed in, an' began to crook their elbows fur ther new man. I soon found out that you'd only laid alongside o' his knowledge-box, an' shook up his idees a little. They was chawin' red-hot carpet-tacks to wade in an' clean out our gang, but he allowed as how it war his funeral, an' he'd call on you when he got ready, as he always played a lone hand."

"But is it known who fired the shot?"

"Not much! Some o' the dog gone fools allows it must a' been that Nevada blow-hard! Haw! haw! haw! He'd bett r make himself scarce about these hyar diggin's, ef he knows what's healthy fur 'im! They'll bolt him, hide an' taller, without nary grain o' salt!"

"But, gov'nor, I've been unloadin' on ther principle o' bread an' butter fust, an' cake arterwards. I've got an idee fur ye that'll make ye jest git up an' howl."

"An' idee?"

"A sh'p-up, ginooine, original, A1 idee o' my own! Ef you tumble to it, maybe we'll make them cussed Little Luckyites squeak yit."

"How can we beat this new man?"

"Hang the new man!"

"With all my heart. But that's easier said than done."

"We'll match him with a bigger one, by Moses!"

"If we could find him."

"I kin put my finger on the very individual."

"Where—who?"

"In this hyar boomin' little berg! Why, I tell ye what it is, gov'nor, Fool's Luck ain't no slouch of a place. When ther new man come in, everybody give a hitch to his boot-straps. They thought they had ther cock o' ther walk. But hyar to-night comes along ther most slambunctious rip snortin' high-cock-alorum of 'em all!"

"A better man than this Iron Despard?"

"Waal, I don't know nothin' about your Iron Despard, but ef he kin hold over Tiger Dick he must turn out mighty airly in ther mornin'."

"Tiger Dick? I've heard of him. Wasn't it Tiger Dick th t effected so desperate an escape from Jim Farnsworth, the Frisco sheriff?"

"You jest bet it war—an' turned road-agent, an' made Freeze-out Camp dance to his fiddlin'! That's ther snoozer."

"And he is here?"

"At ther Bower this blessed minute. Ask Tigh. Haw! haw! haw! Gov'nor, I'll let you inter a neat thing ef ye won't give me away."

And thereupon Rogers recounted the raid upon the "Heathen Chinee" on the preceding

night, and its unexpected termination to the discomfiture of the ex-pugilist, and Wat's humiliation at the Bower.

"Ef ye kin git Tig r Dick to take a hand on our side o' ther game, he'll put ther new man in his breeches pocket—you hear me?"

"If we can get him? We'll try! and if there's virtue in money—"

"Come on!"

Judge Pettigrew started up in his impulsive way. He was already sanguine of success, if only Captain Jack Digby did not cut in ahead of him and buy up Dick as well as Iron Despard.

"It will be a struggle of giants," he mused, as he thought of the meeting of these two indomitable men in a contest for the mastery.

So, these were the men that stopped the Tiger on his way from the Bower.

"I have the pleasure of addressing Mr. Richard Langley, popularly called 'Tiger Dick,' I believe?"

"At your service, sir."

"I am Morton Pettigrew, owner of the Pretty Polly mine."

"I am glad to make your acquaintance, Mr. Pettigrew."

"Are you at leisure? If you are, I should like to have a business interview with you."

"My time is at your disposal."

"It is but a step to my office. We shall be more private there. Unless you prefer a saloon?"

"Lead the way, sir. All places are alike to me."

And though he did not know but that he might be walking into a trap, this desperado, who carried his life in his hand and seemed not to know the meaning of fear, quietly accompanied the strangers to a place of their own choosing, the seclusion of which would favor any act of meditated treachery.

But Tiger Dick, like the great Napoleon, believed in his star of destiny.

"If one is prepared to meet the devil, one need not shun ghosts," he held. "When the grand round-up comes,—good-night, and no regrets!"

But Judge Pettigrew and Bill Rogers were jubilant. Said the latter:

"We've corralled the king of the herd!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BALL OPENS.

WITHOUT apparent purpose, Tiger Dick managed to avoid entering the darkened shanty between his guides. Quietly he stood with his back against the wall and his hands in the side pockets of the sack-coat he wore, until the first flicker of the match struck by the judge showed him that the room was untenanted save by themselves—that all was "on the square."

Liquor and cigars were next in order, and then came business.

Said the judge:

"I have heard of you as a man of extraordinary courage and fertility of resource. I want just such a man to take the leadership of a force of men, to maintain my rights in the only court recognized in this lawless country."

"To plead under the revolver and bowie-knife act!" laughed the Tiger. "That suits me."

"If you will aid me, I will make it worth your while," said the judge, eagerly. "Besides, if you are the man you have the reputation of being, here is a chance for 'fun.'"

"Well, I like 'fun' better than money; though a little of the 'filthy' now and then don't turn my stomach. I got wind of this 'leettle onpleasantness,' and that's what brings me this way."

"You've come to the right shcp, boss, ef ye're sp'ilin' fur a fight," broke in Bill Rogers, grizing admiringly at Dick.

"I think I've seen you before," said the Tiger, turning his penetrating eyes upon the speaker.

"Yeou jest bet ye have, boss!" was the hearty assent—"an' fiddled as lively a tune as ever I danced to, an' that's a fact!"

"I like lively music, when I take a hand in the 'doin's,' smiled the Tiger. "Long meter does very well for camp-meetings; but it takes double time for an all-hands-round at a mining-camp shindy."

But Judge Pettigrew did not wish his interests to be lost sight of in a general discussion; so frowning at his subordinate, he now took up the discourse.

"The Pretty Polly rests on an old Spanish grant of undoubted validity, while Jack Digby doesn't claim any basis but miners' law—"

"Hang the title!" interrupted the Tiger. "That's a question for pettifogging lawyers. Which is the under dog in the fight? That's all I want to know."

"Well, Digby is backed by the miners, of course. They have a common interest in the squatter policy, which justifies them in taking what they want without stopping to ask whom it belongs to."

"The card-sharps and bummers generally," laughed the Tiger, "are on the side which shows up the most rhino and fire-water! That goes without telling. But how of the hybrid that delighteth to call himself the 'honest miner,'

par excellence; yet to the naked eye he hath the seeming of a 'hard citizen' in full standing? Verily he 'crooketh his elbow' more gracefully than he swingeth his pick, and forgetteth not to 'irrigate' both at his incoming and outgoing to wash the yellow sands of Ophir. He is an advocate of law and order—'order up,' according to the 'laws' of Judge Hoyle! It is the man on the fence between respectability and avowed rascality that holds the balance of power, my friend. If you carry him in your breeches-pocket, you command the situation. I presume this gentleman of the itching palm and easy conscience has not overlooked the advantages offered to enterprise by Fool's Luck!"

Judge Pettigrew did not exactly relish Tiger Dick's facetiousness. A subtle sneer seemed to lurk about his flexible lips; and his glance seemed to give a personal significance to his words. He stripped Hypocrisy of her mask and laughed in her face.

"I suppose Fool's Luck is neither better nor worse than her neighbor," said the Judge. "We don't demand a certificate of character from every man who chooses to come among us. Some can be bought with money; some prefer to follow a popular leader. I will provide the money for the former class if you will enlist the latter. In this effort you will have a rival worthy of you, though I hope not your equal."

"Eh? What's that?" demanded the Tiger, quickly.

"Only this evening Jack Digby secured a man whom I despised of being able to match, until I heard of you."

Judge Pettigrew flattered himself that he was playing his fly with a skillful hand. And the Tiger seemed to rise to it at once.

"What man?" he asked. "Who is he?"

"Col. Dangerfield."

"Never heard of him."

"You may have heard of him as Iron Despard. He has made for himself a notoriety of a certain sort."

"Now I hitch on, me noble juk! Iron Despard—the Duelist! Where was it up at Hell-Hole. Rushing smart place. Had a daisy lay-out; but they sat down on him, and found it a hornet's nest. By the gods, he's a man to my liking! I must button on to him. It isn't late yet. I wonder if I couldn't drum him up before bed-time."

"But I hoped to enlist you on my side, against him," interposed the judge, not a little chagrined at the turn matters seemed taking.

Tiger Dick had started up to put his idea into instant execution. However, he paused to say:

"Oh, well, there's nothing to prevent my taking a hand on the opposite side of the table. I'd rather fight a gentleman than a sneak, any day."

"Then you will accept my offer?" asked the judge, eagerly, hope reviving.

"Why not? With Iron Despard to buck against, you're the under dog, my friend. And where would be the fun walking over the course in barness with the undisputed favorite?"

"Then," said the judge, reluctant to let his man slip away so quickly, "it remains but to settle the terms on which—"

"Oh, save that till morning," interrupted Dick. "Any time will do. Now I'm off."

And off he went without more ado.

Judge Pettigrew looked chagrined.

"That's his make-up all the way through," he said. "He feels his oats about as much as any galoot I ever see. You'll have to let him have his head, or he'll kick over the traces. But when he fights—he's beautiful!"

"We ought to have thought to offer to show him around," said the judge. "In that way we could have kept an eye on him."

"He ain't the man to go in leading-strings. Let him alone. If he's yours, he's yours; if he ain't, nothing can make him so."

And with that the judge was forced to rest satisfied.

Meanwhile the Tiger made the rounds; but he failed to find the man he sought. And for a very good reason.

Away from the camp, in the night-shrouded mountain solitude, Iron Despard sat on a boulder, with his elbows on his knees and his hands clasped in his hair. He drew his breath hard through set teeth. In the dense blackness, where the physical eye could distinguish nothing, he gazed with spiritual vision on a fair face whose pleading eyes sought his deprecatingly, the whole framed in a rich mass of red hair.

Ah! had Belle the Beautiful but known! But she did not.

On the following morning Fool's Luck was early astir. There were to be "great doin's"—a mass-meeting and parade in the interest of the Little Lucky mine.

Jack Digby had neither fife nor drum at command; but Sam Slater had a fiddle that always put life into the boys' heels; and that could be depended on to get up enthusiasm.

But Jack had a surprise in store, which he knew would set things "boomin'."

The Bower was thronged with his partisans. When Iron Despard made his appearance, he was given "nine and a tigah" which made the gulch re-echo. He did not smile or seem in any

way affected by this tribute. A grave bow was his only acknowledgment. Even when Capt. Jack, radiant with triumph, grasped his hand in both his own, his manner did not change.

"Colonel, we'll snatch 'em bald-headed!" was Capt. Jack's enthusiastic salute.

"Is everything in readiness?" asked Dangerfield, coldly.

"Yes, if the boys have all irrigated."

"Then let them form at once."

And he re-entered the saloon.

"Fall in, boys!—fall in!" commanded Capt. Jack.

And going among them with sundry slaps on the back and like "horseplay," according to his familiarity with them, he got them into two ranks.

Sam Slater passed to the head of the column with his fiddle, to be saluted with "chaff" all along the line.

"Give her a plenty of elbow-grease, ole man!"

"Saw it off lively!"

"L'arn the Pretty Polly galoots a new step!"

"Give us the Arkansaw Traveler!"

"Rosin 'er up fur all she's worth!"

"Give 'em the chewn the ole cow died on!"

To which the old fellow replied with as good as was sent, and seemed to enjoy it all hugely.

Then the rattle-headed fellows began to mark time, and shout:

"Left! left!—I had a good place when I left!"

Above which one bawled:

"Hay-foot, straw-foot! hay-foot, straw-foot! Hep! hep!"

"Jest keep yer shirts on, boys!" cried Capt. Jack, and disappeared in the saloon.

"Hold on!" was the ready objection. "That's snide! He's gittin' two drinks to our one!"

But a moment later Digby reappeared; and the yell that went up at sight of him seemed as if it would split the welkin.

In his hand he carried a flag of the rudest description—a blanket mounted on a freshly-cut sapling. It bore the following inscription in red and blue letters, sewed in place by Belle the Beautiful's deft needle:

"LITTLE LUCKY FOREVER!"

It seemed as if the men would go wild over this emblem. They broke ranks *instante*, and thronged about Captain Jack, every one tendering his plea to be made standard-bearer.

And the air was filled with hats, and the rocks rung again.

"Hold on byar, you cattle!" cried Captain Jack, good-naturedly. "Do you want to tear the thing to pieces and trample me under foot? Cheese it, boys, you can't all have it."

"Let me have her, Cap. I carried the colors in the Nineteenth Inganna."

"No! no! Give 'er to me!" cried a strapping Missourian. "The Pretty Polly crowd is talkin' about breakin' us up. They'll make a dead set fur the flag, ef they try it on. But they'll have to walk over my dead body before they put their dirty hands on *this* beauty!"

And to him was the flag assigned.

He was right in his statement of the intentions of the Pretty Polly party. There was great danger of a bloody collision before the parade was over.

Judge Pettigrew had enlisted the roughest men in the camp. They were collected in knots along the street and behind shanty walls, swearing that the "procesh" should never be allowed to pass without molestation.

They were already informed that Judge Pettigrew had secured a leader as famous as Iron Despard, and they had urged him to form a counter party and give the Little Luckyites battle. But Tiger Dick had said:

"No, gentlemen! And let me say a word to such of you as don't know me yet. When I undertake to run a thing, I always run it, and in my own way. There is to be no disturbance here to-day, you understand. It don't make any difference whether it is one or twenty of you—the man (or men) who tries to stop that procession has got to take me in, boots and spurs! When I talk, I talk business, every time!"

With that he had coolly left them, walking, as was his habit, with his hands in the side-pockets of the short sack coat he wore.

Then Wat Tigh had stepped up to the judge, with a black scowl on his brows.

"Is that the rooster that's to take the lead out o' my hands?" be asked.

"You're a good man, Wat," the judge replied; "but we've got to have some one to match the new man on the other side. A name is everything with the boys; and this Tiger Dick has a record that can't be beat, for daredevil pluck."

"Then I've got to step down and out, to make room fur him?"

"It's only to tide over this pinch, Wat. And your pay will go on just the same."

"That's all right, boss. We ain't talkin' about the pay jest now. But I don't play no second fiddle to *that* rooster, ye understand!"

"Well, well!" said the judge, growing a little testy, "I don't ask you to. Knock off for a few days, until we're out of this hole. Then your old place will be waiting for you."

Wat turned away with an unintelligible growl. He went among the men and de-

nounced Tiger Dick as a traitor to the Pretty Polly interests.

"Do you see him, already cheek-by-jowl with the Little Luckyites? Jest as like as not him an' this Iron Despard is pardners!"

The men saw Dick approach the Bower, and pass boldly among the partisans of Captain Jack.

The latter regarded him with no friendly eye. They knew that he was the leader who was to oppose their man. Some growled that he was come among them as a spy.

Tiger Dick seemed careless of their suspicious regards. He looked about upon them with cool, careless interest. He read the inscription on the flag as it floated out on the air; but it did not seem to incense him any.

The men set up a yell which was covertly derisive; but the Tiger did not seem to feel that it was a challenge.

So nonchalantly he entered the Bower, and stood in the presence of his rival.

"I have the honor to address Colonel Dangerfield?" be asked, politely.

"That is my name, sir," admitted Iron Despard.

"I am Richard Langley—Tiger Dick! I have the luck to be your opponent to-day."

CHAPTER IX.

THE "PROCESH."

"I HOPE you will drink to our better acquaintance," said Iron Despard, with a *sangfroid* that matched the Tiger's own.

"Nothing would please me better," acquiesced Dick. "Of course our opposition is a business matter. It need not interfere with our personal friendship—if you will accord me so much."

"Mine will be the obligation. I shall be most happy to meet you on this basis."

And Iron Despard extended his hand.

Tiger Dick grasped it cordially.

They turned toward the bar while their hands were thus clasped.

Belle the Beautiful stood regarding them with wide eyes, the picture of astonishment, and an uncommonly pretty one at that.

But she was very pale, and her eyes rested upon Tiger Dick distrustfully, an expression altogether different from that with which she had regarded him the night before.

Iron Despard did not address her, but the Tiger, saying:

"What will you have?"

Yet at the mere sound of his voice a wave of crimson swept over her face, and she turned her eyes toward him, as if constrained.

Tiger Dick had heard an account of the incidents of the night before; and his quick wit guessed the significance of the girl's changing emotions.

"I'll take mine straight," he said, not removing his eyes from her face.

He saw her avoid Iron Despard's eye, as he gave his order; and her hand trembled as she served it.

The stopper of the decanter rolled on the floor back of the bar, and to cover her agitation, Belle went after it.

Then Tiger Dick raised his glass, and with his peculiar, inscrutable smile, said, while he read Iron Despard's face:

"To our long and intimate acquaintance, and"—lowering his voice—"may I add—the beauty of our pretty hostess?"

"As you please," was Iron Despard's brief reply; but his face became like stone.

Tiger Dick laughed internally.

"It's a bad case," he reflected. "Good luck to 'em!"

Then he ordered cigars, and when Belle the Beauiful placed them before him, said to her:

"But you're going to light it for me? What can equal the flavor imparted by beautiful lips?"

Yesterday Belle would have put him off with a witty evasion, which would have just enough of earnestness back of it to tell him that he had made a mistake, if he assumed that she would put up with any undue familiarity from a stranger. But now all was changed. In the presence of the man who had inspired her with a passion which revived all the best points of her womanhood, she felt humiliated that any stranger might address her with this off-hand gallantry.

For this girl had a most calamitous history. She had been reared in the first circles of society in an Eastern city, and knew what was due a lady.

"Excuse me, sir!" she said, turning pale with indignation. "I run my business on strictly business principles."

But the Tiger was not to be "set back," even by a resentful beauty. He laughed pleasantly, and turning to Iron Despard said, with mock ruefulness:

"Try your luck, colonel. The divinity may be partial to shoulder-straps."

"I could not hope for favor where Tiger Dick had failed," said Iron Despard.

But he did not smile, nor look at Belle the Beautiful.

At this moment a diversion was created by the entrance of Captain Jack. He looked sur-

prised to see the two avowed antagonists in so friendly an attitude.

Iron Despard introduced Tiger Dick, as if it were the most natural situation in the world; and the Tiger was as perfectly at his ease, though Captain Jack was plainly constrained and distrustful. Indeed, he was obviously reluctant to take the cigar which Dick pressed upon him.

"Colonel," said the Tiger, as they parted at the door of the saloon, "don't let your men crowd us too hard, and I'll see that you are not disturbed."

"I will smooth matters as much as possible," answered Iron Despard.

Then he turned to the waiting procession; and Tiger Dick strolled down the street in advance, with his hands, as usual, in his pockets.

"Gentlemen," said Iron Despard, addressing the ill-assorted crowd in true Western style, "the purpose of this demonstration is to show our strength, and in that way to prevent the antagonism of interests from being carried to the extent of an open, violent struggle; but in the state of excitement now existing it will be an easy matter to make it the provocation to a bloody fight. To avoid this I order that no weapons shall be drawn until I command it; and, while you may cheer as much as you like for your own men and cause, you shall not groan the men opposed to us, nor jeer at any party whom you may pass. Understand, the man who disobeys my orders must account to me!"

Then he placed himself at the head of the column; Sam Slater, who had been waiting impatiently, struck up a jig with a will; and the men "stepped off."

Such a procession was never seen outside of a Western town. Such yells, such antics, "sich a gittin' over the ground," were inimitable by any other people. They jigged forew rd; they capered sideways; they marched with burlesque pomposity; they hopped; they went on all fours; they even "turned cartwheels," in the mad abandon of hilarity.

The officers whom Iron Despard had instructed in the importance of preserving as much moderation as possible, alternately resorted to persuasion and profanity, and once in a while to physical force, to tame the most boisterous.

So they passed along the one street of the camp until they came to a point where Wat Tigh had massed a large body of Pretty Polly men. Then "things looked blue!"

The crowd was made up of the worst characters in Fool's Luck, among whom Wat Tigh's pugilistic record had made him quite a hero. Their brutal faces, many of them disfigured by ugly scars, were now sullen with black frowns. They stood with their hands on ready weapons.

No aggressive plan had yet been formed; but they were like tow awaiting the spark which would start the conflagration.

Wat Tigh, in advance, scowled blackly as Tiger Dick strode carelessly up, just ahead of the Little Lucky procession.

With his inimitable coolness, the Tiger stepped up to the bully and put his hand on his shoulder, saying to the astonished mob:

"Gentlemen, this is my lieutenant. He has orders to shoot dead in his tracks the first man who draws a weapon while this procession is passing."

There was no look of sternness in the eye that roved easily over the crowd, nor ring of command in the pleasant voice, which ill-fitted the portentous words. But every man there felt that there was a hand of steel beneath the glove of silk. The Tiger sheathes its claws in a paw as soft as a puff ball!

The hand that rested on his shoulder as light as the playful touch of a lady's fan, seemed to Wat Tigh as though it were of iron, red hot. He shrank from beneath it and slunk back, hanging his head like the cowed brute that he was.

"Cheese it, boys," he said. "We don't want no trouble—not now."

And one and all caught the contagion of his craven fear, and stood mute, buddled together as if for mutual support, while the procession passed unmolested.

But this might not have been if Iron Despard had not stopped just at that point and let his men pass under his eye. His stern presence checked the derisive yells that rose in the throats of the zealous Little Luckyites.

He stood with his back to the hostile mob, plainly showing that he braved the danger of a treacherous shot in the back, or trusted implicitly to Tiger Dick's influence to protect him.

But the Tiger, having laid his commands on the crowd, and delegated their enforcement to his lieutenant, as he called Wat, coolly turned his back on the malcontents and stood looking at the procession with the quiet interest of a spectator who had nothing at stake.

Nothing could have been easier to Wat Tigh, or to any of the crowd than to shoot him down in cold blood. The Tiger knew this. But it was by thus putting his life in the hands of men who hated him more bitterly than death that he cowed them until they dared not even shoot at his back.

In contrast with the careless ease of the Tiger, Iron Despard stood with folded arms, stern, silent, Sphynx-like, his men quailing beneath his cold, unwavering gaze.

So like in their power, so unlike in their methods, who were these two men who had simultaneously made their appearance in the camp at the most critical moment of its history?

Captain Jack and Judge Pettigrew were both asking themselves this question. Neither understood the harmony that had been established between the champions. They seemed to work together for a common end. When the ends diverged as widely as the North from the South pole, would they honestly oppose each other in the interests of their respective employers?

"I don't like their friendly relationship," said Captain Jack to himself. "I don't take a man's hand when I'm waiting for a chance to strike at his heart."

"Suppose they are secretly in collusion for some purpose of their own, while playing us off against one another," mused Judge Pettigrew. "I don't much relish being one of the monkeys to their role of fox, and having my cheese bit in the interest of first one and then the other until it is all eaten up. I wish neither had ever stumbled upon this camp. We could have fought it out without them."

But both were there, with every prospect of their staying as long as it pleased them!

"Gent's," declared Wat Tigh, with conviction, "them's pards! Ye b'ear me? Them's pards, I say. They're pullin' the wool over our eyes. They're goin' to play this camp for all she's worth!"

Belle the Beautiful had come out to see the pageant. Her eyes rested on Tiger Dick with no friendliness.

"He means treachery!" she told her secret heart. "Oh, if—if—"

But even in her thoughts the cry of her soul no further took the form of words.

But Tiger Dick, who saw her and noted the changed expression in her eyes when they rested on himself and on his opponent, smiled within himself; for he read her secret fear.

In his cool way he approached her, as she stood a little apart from the others, where their conversation would not be overheard.

"I had hoped to impress you differently, even on so short an acquaintance," he said. "Is there, then, anything about me so very terrible? You're afraid of me, aren't you?"

The color fled from her cheeks; but it mounted again under the half-satirical light in his eyes.

She drew herself up, like "a daughter of the gods, divinely tall, and most divinely fair."

"No!" she declared. "I am not afraid of you; but I hate you with my whole heart and soul!"

The Tiger arched his eyebrows, smiling all undisturbed.

"There's frankness for you, at any rate!" he said. "Where liars are so common, it is quite refreshing to find some one who tells the truth without flinching. I suppose it's the mountain air!"

He looked at her, and spoke as if he were politely conjecturing the cause of the healthful color in her cheeks.

Belle the Beautiful had wit enough to see that this man's coo'ness was impervious to her heroics. She changed her tactics with a woman's deftness.

"No doubt," she assented, and quickly and meaningly added: "You haven't been in these parts long, have you?"

The Tiger laughed aloud; a clear, musical, care-free laugh.

"Good! good!" he cried, with evident relish. "Your wit is only equaled by your beauty. You quite win my heart, I assure you."

"Thank you; but I have no use for it."

"Having none to give in return, I suppose."

And his smile and relentless eye brought the color again to her cheeks in spite of herself.

"But why do you distrust me?" he asked.

"'No trust' is the motto of the Bower," she answered, evasively.

"But not always of its mistress, it seems. I suspect that she has trusted out the most precious thing that was ever behind her bar."

"I don't understand you," she said; but she was panting with sudden agitation.

He had looked away from her down the street, to where Iron Despard was returning at the head of his men. As if changing the subject, he observed:

"The New Man, as your townspeople seem to have agreed by common consent to call him, is an uncommonly fine fellow—isn't he?"

"I haven't noticed," she replied.

"Ah!" he ejaculated, slowly, turning his eyes full upon her. "I see one is liable to relapses from the salubrious effects of the climate."

The audacity of this speech piqued her. She no longer pretended to misunderstand him. But with *sangfroid* that equaled his own, for she was now on her metal, she retorted:

"You are quick to feel its beneficial effects; for already you outrival the oldest inhabitant in frankness. But I think you must have brought your rudeness from the States."

The Tiger laughed.

"I'm a hard one, ain't I?" he asked.

"I quite agree with you," she assented.

"Well," he replied, "I'll bet you a bridal outfit to a kiss that within thirty days you'll say I'm the best fellow in the camp! No? Well, make it *next* to the best. Come! is it a go?"

"Say that you're the best? Suppose I only think it?"

"Oh, but you'll say what you think, of course. You and I always do, you know."

"And lose my bridal outfit and a kiss in the bargain? I'm shrewder than that, I promise you!"

"I'll give you *two* outfits for a kiss; and the loss of your wager canceling only one will leave you an outfit and a kiss. Come, my beauty! my arithmetic is as good as yours."

"I think I'll take time to consider. Meanwhile you had better put your foot on the necks of those brutes once more."

"They're as harmless as lambs. Don't drive me from your presence. I want to begin to show you what a clever fellow I am when I try to be. I've only thirty days to do it in, you know."

"Excuse me. I have duties of my own."

And she withdrew to the Bower.

Once within, her bantering manner disappeared.

"He cannot deceive me!" she said to her palpitating heart. "The more smiling his mask, the deadlier his purpose! He has discovered my secret, and fears a woman's vigilance, where her heart—"

But again she left her thought incomplete, and hid her crimson face in her hands.

"Oh! and it is unsought!" she moaned. "He spurns it under his feet! But what should I expect?—I!"

And she burst into heart-broken sobs.

Without, Tiger Dick was joined by his employer.

"Well," said the judge, and there was gloom in his face and distrust in his voice, "what is the prospect?"

But even while he spoke, Tiger Dick heard a voice like a chime of silver bells crying:

"Papa! papa!"

The Tiger looked over Judge Pettigrew's shoulder, and saw a bewitching little blonde hurrying after the owner of the Pretty Polly mine.

She checked herself when she saw that her father had stopped to speak to a stranger. Then she came on, with the self-possession of a young lady who had seen enough of society to know how to carry herself with grace.

There was hair as yellow as golden grain, eyes as blue as the summer sea, cheeks with the soft tinting of apple blossoms, lips that looked like crimson velvet—all wrought into an arch smile that dimpled the plump cheeks, and disclosed teeth without fleck or flaw.

A flush of vexation overspread the judge's face. But his daughter stood on the one hand, looking as if she expected to have the stranger introduced to her; and there was that about Dick which made it felt that he exacted all the amenities due to a gentleman.

"My daughter," said the judge, as if choked him, "Mr. Langley."

CHAPTER X.

FRAMING THE PLOT.

"THE pleasure of knowing Miss Pettigrew is only surpassed by surprise at meeting such an ornament to her sex in this out-of-the-way place!" said Dick, in his most gallant style.

He had already weighed Miss Pettigrew.

She colored with tickled vanity.

"The pleasure is mutual, I assure you, sir," she replied, with a marked courtesy, adding, coquettishly—"and the surprise."

"But, papa," she cried, almost immediately, "I'm afraid to stand here! Will they get to fighting, do you think, Mr. Langley?"

Her great liquid eyes went up to his in earnest appeal, and she shrunk between him and her father with enchanting timidity, as she went on:

"Oh! if I were only in a place of safety!"

"If Miss Pettigrew will allow me to escort her," the Tiger hastened to suggest.

"Oh, will you?" she cried, again lifting her blue eyes to his with pretty gratitude and perfect trust.

And she instantly put her hand on his proffered arm, and the Tiger whisked her away, leaving her parent breathless with astonishment, and not seeing clearly how it had all happened.

He did not know, but Tiger Dick did, that the little coquette had timed her coming to him and got up her little scare all for this very end. And the Tiger, nothing loth, "dropped to her little game," and fell in with it with a tact which quite charmed Miss Polly.

"He's an awful flirt, I know," was her mental comment.

"She's as nice as she's naughty!" thought the Tiger.

He immediately set a little trap for her, into which she put her dainty foot without suspecting it, even after it had been done.

"Though kept by one of the sex, I suppose

the Bower has no place of entertainment for ladies?" he observed, innocently.

"Indeed, no!" she replied, with a bridling that told him all he wanted to know. "The lady who keeps it is hardly recognized as such, even by so poor society as Fool's Luck can boast."

The Tiger chuckled internally.

"The quality of society does not depend upon numbers," he said, with a meaning look. "I am sure Fool's Luck is to be congratulated as exceptionally favored. But, a stranger myself, I hardly know where to take you."

"If you think that the *danger* is really not great," she replied, with an arch glance, "I think I should like to be where I shall not lose all the spectacles."

"There is nothing to be apprehended on your part," he laughed; "but I feel that I am laying myself liable to be wounded to the heart."

"Hush!" was her rebuke, as she gave his arm a little jerk.

But Pretty Polly's escort was evidently to her liking, and Dick—well, as he had said, he thought her "as nice as she was naughty."

While bandying gallantries with her he suddenly conceived a plan of action which included Miss Polly as one of its chief agents.

"Miss Pettigrew," he asked abruptly, "have you seen this New Man?"

"Certainly—at a distance."

"But, has he seen you?"

"Oh, how should he notice any one so insignificant as I?"

"S'rious'y, you have not met him? He has not seen you near enough to distinguish your face or figure! Once seen, even in a throng, he could not fail to recognize them again."

"No; I have every reason to believe that he is totally unaware of the existence of my precious self."

"He has yet to be blessed! But I have a great favor to ask of you."

"Oh, anything that I can grant, of course. Shall be delighted."

"It is that you will keep aloof from him—for the present."

"Oh, fie! You're not jealous!"

But Miss Polly broke off with a giggle and a blush at her own boldness.

"I'm not ashamed to admit that I am," declared Dick squarely, putting his disengaged hand on the dainty, kidded member that rested on his arm, as if apprehensive that she might slip away from him on the instant. "But there is another reason also. If you will let me take you into this grove, where the leaves will partially screen you from outside observation without preventing you from seeing and hearing, I will disclose my plans to you while the speech-making is in progress."

Miss Polly readily assented, devoured by curiosity and charmed with the first spicy flirtation she had had an opportunity to indulge in since coming to the mining-camp.

In a few minutes she was seated on a fallen pine tree, within earshot of the spot where the procession came to a halt, to listen to speeches by Captain Jack Digby, Iron Despard, Eben Harkness, Esq., and Lige Bigelow. But, as is not infrequently the case with her sisters, the public occasion proved only a pretext to cover her real interest in her escort.

"Miss Pettigrew," began Dick, "I have not been long in making the discovery that you are a rare actress."

"Oh! you don't mean it!" she cried.

Her eyes flashed with delight, and she clasped her hands in her eagerness.

"But I do mean it!" insisted the Tiger. "And it rests entirely with yourself whether or not you have an opportunity to exercise your talent to some purpose."

"An actress!" she panted, breathlessly. "Are you a theater manager? But I couldn't go on the stage!—oh, I couldn't! It would be my heart's delight; but papa wouldn't hear to it. What would he say?"

"I am not a theater manager. My plays are always in real life. Some are farces, some tragedies; but they all have the elements of a successful drama—a plen'y of 'go.' If you put yourself under my management, your acting will be in the interests of your father; your stage will be your own home; and you shall have the New Man in the role of Romeo to your Juliet."

"Oh! I don't understand a word you're saying!" cried the girl, excitedly. "What are you talking about? How can I have a stage to play on in my own home, when it's nothing but a—a—shanty, like all the rest? And I don't even know Colonel Dangerfield; and papa wouldn't hear to my playing with him, and be on the other side, if I did, and you have just said you didn't want me to get acquainted with him—you know you did!" as she detected a twinkle in Dick's eye. "And papa wouldn't take money that I had made in such a way—just think of it!—eight bits a head!—so how could it be in his interest? I don't understand you. I believe you're only making game of me! I suppose I'm such a silly goose!"

"My dear Miss Pettigrew! Indeed, I protest!" urged Dick, earnestly. "I mean just what I say; and if you will listen, I'll explain

it all to you. But, first, there must be no eavesdroppers.

"Oh! there's nobody at all; and we can speak lower. Go on! go on!"

In her eagerness Pretty Polly clasped Dick's arm with both her daintily-kidined hands; for even in this rough mining-camp she never neglected any of the requisites of the toilet imposed by civilization. To a coquette any man is a man; and she dressed for the best that her little world afforded.

Bu cool Dick never lost his head, whatever happened to his heart; so he assured himself that no one was within earshot before he proceeded. Then he sat very close to Miss Polly, and poured his plan into her waiting ear.

She listened with her face aglow, her eyes flashing, her lips apart, her bosom palpitating with delicious excitement. She assailed him with a running fire of questions as to minutest details, which showed with what intelligence she entered into his plot, and at the end she clapped her hands gleefully, crying:

"Oh, I can do it—I know I can—if papa will only let me! It's better than any play! It's like one of Miss Braddon's novels, or Mrs. Wood's; and I'm to do it *my very own self!* But—but—" and her eyes grew wide, and darkened with vague horror—"it looks dreadful! I shall feel like Lucretia Borgia! You promise that you won't—won't—hurt him?"

"Hurt him?" laughed the Tiger. "I'd give a finger, at least, to be in his place! He's a lucky dog that don't know what he owes to me. A draught from *this* dear hand!"—and he boldly lifted it to his lips. "He'd be a churl indeed who stopped to ask what was in the beaker blessed by its sweet touch!"

"That's a very pretty speech, Mr. Langley," said Polly, blushing and smiling. "But, like all pretty speeches, one must be careful to let it die in the ear, as it was born on the lip."

"But," Dick hastened to urge, "if its source was the heart, its destination should be the heart also."

"Perhaps!" and her eyes fell before his ardent glance, and the color deepened in her cheeks.

Look out, Miss Polly! You've met your match, even at your own game!

"Let us go to papa at once," she suggested, a feeling of uneasiness creeping over her.

Dick acquiesced. He knew a thing or two about women!

"Play 'em with a loose line," was his philosophy, "and they'll come to the surface of their own accord!"

On their way to find Judge Pettigrew they passed where Belle the Beautiful saw them. She noted the gentle deference which the Tiger showed to Miss Pettigrew, so different from the off-hand, almost flippant freedom with which he had addressed himself to her. And Polly's manner had in it the easy, assured grace of one who rules with that only right divine, the sway of a woman whom men respect.

A hard, painful lump swelled in Belle's throat, forcing tears into her eyes; her lips quivered, and her bosom began to labor beneath a crushing burden.

"Oh, God!" was the moan of her stricken spirit, though no sound issued from her white lips. "Lost! lost! lost! Never again!—oh, never again!"

But the world passed her by, none guessing her agony!

Judge Pettigrew was found standing aloof from his fellow-men, frowning in gloomy thought.

"Well, sir," was Dick's cheery salute, "the enemy makes a very fair showing."

"Too fair for us, I'm afraid," responded the judge, despondently.

"Tut! tut! my dear sir. Keep the blue devils at bay, whatever else you do. 'Never say die!'—that's my motto."

"But where are we to get men enough to match them? Do you know what has happened?"

"There may be events of which I am not informed. To what do you particularly refer?"

"To the fact that some of our best men have gone over. And Wat Tigh and his gang may swing out of line at any moment."

"Indeed!" said Dick, coolly. "How do you account for the desertions?"

"It appears that one of our men was present at some mining-camp where Iron Despard killed half a dozen men in as many bloody duels, and then single-handed defied the whole camp. He was driven out and his gambling lay-out destroyed; but he left his mark in fire and blood, almost to the annihilation of the place. He became known as Despard the Duelist; and many believed that he was in league with the devil. This story has gone like wildfire through Fool's Luck, last night and this morning; and, believing him invincible, a lot of men whom we can ill spare have gone over to be on the winning side."

"And Wat Tigh, and his men?"

"Wat bates you more than he loves me."

"Or your money."

"Of course. I don't look for personal fidelity from such a scoundrel."

"But he must bear little love to the man who used him so roughly last night."

"There is no danger of his going over to the enemy; but he may take my money, and fight my cause with so little ardor as to be practically worthless."

"True. And now let me say that I have foreseen all this, and have come to the conclusion that the Pretty Polly must depend for defense more on the wit than on the muscle of her friends."

"Ah! What, then, are your plans? I suppose you have some?"

"Certainly. But, before stating them, let me observe that our cause is in a very precarious situation just at present."

"I appreciate that fact, sir. Go on."

"You are willing to make some personal sacrifice to retrieve lost ground?"

"I will put all I'm worth into it—make or break! Sooner than be defeated by Jack Dibby, I'd go forth to-morrow a beggar! I've handled my pick and pan; I'd do it again."

"But money isn't always our most precious possession. Suppose you were required to throw into the scale that which you hold more dear than money?"

"I don't understand you, sir. What do you mean?"

"I mean—*your daughter*."

"My daughter!" cried the judge, in amazement. "What can she have to do with the matter?"

"Oh, *everything!*" cried that little lady, clapping her hands and shrugging up her plump shoulders like an excited child, while she stood before her staring parent with sparkling eyes. "Mr. Langley and I will 'pull you through,' as that absurd Lige Bigelow would say."

She laughed merrily up at Tiger Dick, adding:

"Mr. Bigelow is one of my oldest and most ardent admirers, though he is one of the enemy."

But for her father's presence, Dick would have told her that he should call Mr. Bigelow out at sunrise the next morning. As it was, she read the menace in his eyes, though he held his tongue.

The judge frowned at the evident familiarity which had sprung up so suddenly between his daughter and this stranger of the night before—a man with an unsavory reputation—and could but exclaim:

"You and Mr. Langley! Pray explain yourself."

"You realize the fact that you are a ruined man if recourse is not had to some unusual means of turning the tide?" asked the Tiger.

"That's plain enough," admitted the judge.

Then his thoughts recurred to Wat Tigh's suggestion; and, scarcely conscious of what he was saying, he muttered:

"If that fellow were only out of the way!"

"Exactly!" asserted Tiger Dick. "And we purpose to put him out of the way."

"What!" cried the judge, starting back, and turning pale.

"Oh, papa! I can do it, just as easy as not!" cried Polly, the words having a different significance to her from the bloody one they bore in her father's mind.

She did not interpret aright his horror. She only saw his aversion to having her drawn into this fight, which was only suited to men. So, as he stepped back, she followed him, seizing his hands, and crying in an affected babyish way:

"Oh, please! please! ple-e-ease!"

"Good God!" ejaculated her father, shaking off her clasp and staring at her as if she had been suddenly transformed into a monster. "Is my child a murderer too?"

Polly started back with a scream, and stood trembling.

"Oho!" mused the Tiger, as he stroked his mustache, perhaps to hide the smile that came to his lips. "So he's been thinking of *that*, has he? A murderer's daughter! Well, the fairest lilies spring from the foulest mud."

"Oh, tell him, tell him, Mr. Langley!" cried Pretty Polly, appealingly.

And thereupon Dick, with his imperturbable coolness, unfolded his plan.

"You see," he said, in conclusion, looking penetratingly into Judge Pettigrew's eyes, "we were not using the words in quite the same significance."

The judge frowned. He knew that his secret was out. And how he hated the man whose clear vision had read him to the heart.

As far as any real principle was concerned, he eagerly accepted the proffered relief, even at the expense of involving his daughter in a scheme which would hardly leave her womanhood without a smirch. But his pride—that is to say, his vanity, his regard for appearances—led him to make a show of reluctance.

Tiger Dick read him perfectly, and having little patience with hypocrisy, as he disdained to mask his own knavery, he broke in upon his objections without ceremony, declaring:

"Well, the matter is settled. Now for putting the plot into execution."

"But I haven't stated my terms yet," said Polly, saucily.

"And what are they, pray?" asked Dick.

"If we succeed you'll make a lot of money out of this?"

"Yes," admitted her father.

"Then you can afford to let me go to Frisco next winter."

"You shall go."

"And have all the ball-dresses I want?"

"All that heart can wish, my dear."

"Done!"

If Iron Despard could have known how cheaply he was disposed of!

Tiger Dick laughed.

CHAPTER XI.

WAT TIGH'S "HAND."

BEFORE the advent of Tiger Dick and Iron Despard, the rival mine-owners had both enlisted little armies, with the clear understanding that the new hands were not employed to work, but were to go down into the respective mines armed to the teeth and ready for battle, in case of a collision underground.

In anticipation of their wants, a practically unlimited supply of whisky and cigars was to be sent down the main shafts of both mines; but they were expected to carry their own cards and dice, the former trimmed and variously marked, the latter loaded. And thus, while they waited for the wall of rock and ore which divided the two mines to be blasted through, they could while the time below ground with liquor, tobacco, gambling, profanity and fighting, just as they were accustomed to above.

Among these ruffians Wat Tigh's pugilistic record made him a man of influence; and he had almost as many friends in the Little Lucky ranks as under his own leadership in the interests of the Pretty Polly. Their attaching themselves to the opposite party was only a matter of business, decided by the most whisky down and the roundest promises of money in the event of success. Meanwhile, any of them would "sell out" his employer the moment a more favorable prospect offered.

Among these men, then, throughout the day, Wat moved, selecting those in whose discretion he placed the most confidence, without reference to their particular party affiliations, but taking care not to excite remark.

That eight the hardest characters in the camp were not in their accustomed places about the gambling-tables. One by one they had slunk away from the camp shortly before midnight, to assemble in a desolate gorge, a mile or more distant.

Skulking like wolves, each had been challenged by a shadowy sentinel at the mouth of the gorge and had given a muttered password. The sentinel had been none other than Wat Tigh himself; and no one passed him until he was satisfied of his identity.

When all had congregated, the man who had called this strange meeting delegated to another the duty of guarding the entrance to their weird council-chamber, and took up his position in their midst.

"Gentlemen," he began, "I allow we're all pards?"

"You bet we are, boss!"

"We ain't nothin' else!"

"Ye kin pile yer chips on that proposition!"

And similar assurances came from all sides.

"I reckon," he continued, "we love our own pockets better'n any body else's!"

"So to speak!" laughed one.

"Put money in thy purse," quoted another.

"This is the first and greatest commandment."

"Waal, boys," said Wat, "that's jest what I propose to do."

"Hear! hear!"

"I'm with ye, gov'nor!"

"That's whar I live!"

"Spit'er out, Wat; ye have my sympathy."

"Hold on, fellers!" opposed their leader, restraining their eagerness; "ye don't take no lucre up without somebody lays it down, ye understand."

"Right ye are, boss."

"To thunder with who lays it down! What do we care, so long as we gits our hooks on it?"

The universal and enthusiastic endorsement which this sentiment called forth, sufficiently indicated the character of the men.

"But, gents," still urged Wat, "in a lay o' this sort it plays hob to git a pig under the gate. One squeal—Eh! what's the word?"

He looked around upon them significantly, leaving them to interpret his enigmatical speech.

"One at least 'dropped,'" for he at once replied:

"Tie up yer pigs, boss."

"Co'-rect!" responded Wat, emphatically.

Then he proceeded to administer an oath full of the most horrible imprecations on treachery, and binding each to visit the traitor with swift death, no matter how close the tie of friendship between the culprit and the avenger.

Having secured all to his satisfaction, he went on:

"Gents, you've all seen the doin's in the last twenty-four hours, an' I reckon you've all taken the measure o' the gay an' festive galoots that has clapped Fool's Luck in their breeches-pockets."

"Bet yer life, ole hoss!"

"They're fly, an' no mistake!"

"That's all right," replied Wat, to the last interruption. "But they're a heap too cunnin' fur these byar diggin's. So fur I've took a back seat. 'Cause why? Because it wouldn't put no money in my pocket nor anybody else's to kick up a row. When I see my way to something that shows the color, I go in."

"That thar's what I calls boss sense," declared a syrophantic admirer.

"Now, gents," pursued Wat, "these byar new parties is on a mighty cute lay, but I propose to take a hand ag'in 'em an' show 'em somethin' in the cards they never see before. Thar's millions in it fur them that goes in with me; an' ef we don't rake the board, it'll be through our own dog gone foolishness."

He then set forth his plot, which will be developed as our story progresses.

"Remember," he said in conclusion, "ef I miss o' the gal myself, the man that brings her through gits five hundred dollars over and above his regular share."

Then, having renewed their pledges, they skulked back to camp.

CHAPTER XII.

THE SIREN.

THE New Man was a queer fish in more ways than one. Nobody could quite make him out.

He never smiled; his eyes never brightened with interest nor flashed with excitement. In moments which called for prompt and vigorous action, his movements had the cold precision of machinery. Without being morose, he was as grave as if he wore an iron mask.

He was in the habit of taking solitary walks in the mountains, with no object save to be alone with his gloomy thoughts.

It was on such an occasion that he heard the clatter of a horse's hoofs, and a woman's voice crying desperately:

"Whoa! whoa!"

Lifting his eyes from the ground with his usual cool deliberateness, he saw a horse tearing down upon him at breakneck speed, and on his back, clinging to her saddle as for dear life, a woman with streaming hair and fluttering skirts.

It had all the appearance of a runaway. He did not know that it was only a clever bit of acting, got up for his especial benefit—that Miss Polly, having the spirit of a dare-devil beneath her pretty exterior, had trained her horse to those wild dashes, for the fun of the thing, and now put this unusual accomplishment to account for the purpose of introducing herself to him in a striking and romantic manner.

"Only let the goose think that he has saved my life, and I have got him 'dead to rights!'"

And in her saucy way, Miss Polly "made a mouth," as she let the bit of slang pass even in her thoughts; for, while she could talk slang as well as Belle the Beautiful, if she chose, she knew that it was as "naughty as it was nice."

"Help! help! Ob, save me!" she cried, as she approached the New Man.

But she had the chagrin of seeing that he did not go wild with fear lest even her precious neck should be broken.

Instead, he coolly leaned the stick he was carrying against a rock, and, putting the flaps of his cloak back of his shoulders without any particular hurry, quietly waited for the flying horse to come up to him. Not a line of his face changed.

"Tue stock! the stone!" thought Miss Pettigrew, in great disgust; and she so far modified the expression of helpless terror on her face, as to pout her red under lip. "He isn't a man! He isn't human! He hasn't the soul of a Sioux! But I will give him a shaking up, physical if not mental!"

And in a fit of sudden petulance, Miss Polly very recklessly threw herself from the back of her horse plump into Iron Despard's arms!

The shock, taking him unawares, threw him from his balance, and broke his hold upon the bridle so that her horse coursed away at full speed, while Despard barely saved her and himself from rolling on the rocky trail by catching his weight on one hand.

She clung to him in the most bewitching way imaginable, and nearly fainted—but not quite!

Through it all he did not seem much disturbed, but very quietly supported her on his arm, while he said, in his usual collected tones:

"I hope you are not much hurt?"

"I don't know," she gasped, and closed her eyes, as with a feeling of faintness.

He coolly reached for his hat, where it had fallen, and commenced fanning her, waiting without any manifestation of anxiety till she recovered.

"I declare!" she reflected, "one would suppose, from his indifference, that he was in the habit of catching young ladies in this way every day of his life."

But Iron Despard was looking at her as he had not looked at women since the bitter betrayal of his love.

He hated her, as he did all the rest; but she interested him.

She looked so innocent and childlike that he fell to wondering how she would manifest that

treachery he held to be the nature of all women.

Presently she seemed to recover, and made a modest effort to withdraw from his encircling arm, but sunk back panting, with a little scream, as of harp pain.

"My foot!" she gasped. "I think—"

And there she stopped, just on the verge of a lie; for there was nothing in particular the matter with her foot, or ankle, as she intended to convey.

It was all done very prettily and any other man would have felt an almost irresistible impulse to kiss her; but Iron Despard said with as little apparent emotion as if she had been a stogy-booted miner:

"I will make you as comfortable here as I can, and go to the camp for some sort of conveyance, or a stretcher, to carry you on."

"A stretcher!" she groaned, internally. "The brute! No man with a spark of manhood about him would ever dream of anything else but to carry me—and I weighing only ninety-eight pounds and a half! He's a clod! He's—he's—I don't know what; and I hate him!"

Nevertheless, in a quavering voice that would have become a suffering angel, she said:

"Oh, no, thank you. I won't put you to so much trouble. I think—I can walk, if you—don't mind giving me your—arm."

There was a stray tear or two on her golden lashes now. They looked very pretty, and were nicely in keeping with the pain she was supposed to be suffering. However, Iron Despard looked at them unmoved as he helped her to her feet, expressing no sympathy when she winced.

Still her voice was sweet and low, with pathetic little breaks in it, as she said:

"You have saved my life, Colonel Dangerfield; and I can never thank you sufficiently."

Here she lifted her eyes to his for an instant, shyly, yet eloquently.

Then a faint color came into her cheeks, and she smiled, that arch smile which made Lige Bigelow "howl"—so he said—"in seven different languages!" It was a pitiful little smile, that faded suddenly into a look of pain, as she leaned for an instant more heavily on his arm. Then it came back again, bravely, as she continued:

"It was very generous to save your enemy's daughter. But perhaps you would have left me to my fate had you known that the Pretty Polly mine was named for me."

The smile that belied her words ought to have turned his heart inside out; but, as deliberately as if he were reading from a book, he said:

"Miss Pettigrew needs no assurance that her protection from inconvenience, not to say danger, would come before every other consideration."

In her heart, Miss Pettigrew's comment on this speech was:

"Dear me! he ought to have a nice little pair of stilts!"

But her face put on an expression of sly depreciation and earnestness as she said aloud:

"I hope, Colonel Dangerfield, that you will consider the opposition between you and my father as a purely business matter. Socially, I know that he will be glad to meet you and make proper acknowledgement of his indebtedness to you through his daughter. Moreover, I have no mind to let money matters, which I do not understand, deprive me of what I hope may ripen into a friendship—if," she interposed, with an upward glance, "it would be agreeable to you."

And then, in explanation of her advances, which might ordinarily be considered rather bold:

"Gentlemen are not so plenty in Fool's Luck society that one can afford to quarrel with them over trifles. These rough fellows mean well enough, most of them; but a little more refinement is a very acceptable addition."

"Miss Pettigrew is too kind," replied Iron Despard, still invulnerable to her coquetry. "I beg her to believe that I have no personal feeling in the business difference to which she refers."

"Then you won't refuse to take tea with me—will you?"

The invitation was tendered in a caressing little tone; and you would have thought, with the dove-like look in the eyes she raised pleadingly to his face, that her heart stood still while she waited for his answer.

In his wonted cold, formal way, Iron Despard replied:

"It would be a poor return for Miss Pettigrew's courtesy to consent to tax her strength—"

But Polly broke in:

"Oh, by the way you begin, I know you are going to say no. But I won't take a denial. You need have no fears on my account. I shall walk quite easily as soon as I get off of this rough way upon an even floor. You shall have cake of my baking; and I will make you, with my own hand, a cup of golden nectar, which you will admit is fit for the gods. Don't speak! I lay my commands on you! And a true soldier cannot question the authority of a lady."

Iron Despard bowed submission.

"Miss Pettigrew's cordiality is quite irresistible," he said.

The twilight was deepening as these two made their way slowly along the rugged path; but even had it been otherwise, they could not have known that their voices had gone ahead of them around an angle of the rock, and pierced to the heart of a girl who stopped with a gasp of pain, raised her hand involuntarily to her breast, and, after a moment of frightened hesitation, sprung aside, and secreted herself behind a clump of bushes.

Had she waited to meet the mine-owner's daughter, she would have been treated to a supercilious stare, such as only a woman can give another, which would have taken her in from the broad brimmed hat that sat on her head with a jaunty grace all its own, to the thick-soled and serviceable yet shapely shoes that incased her high-arched feet. As Lige Bigelow said, Polly always tried to "set down on" the pretty saloon-keeper.

Had it been suggested that there was a rivalry between them for the belleship of Fool's Luck, Miss Polly would have denied it with fine scorn; yet such was the fact.

The boys said they "ran neck and neck."

And yet there was a difference.

Polly was ornamental; but who would have dreamed of going to her for help when he was "in a hole?"

On the other hand, Belle "would do to tie to."

Polly was for the man with whom "things was boomin'"; but "the poor devil whose luck had downed him," turned instinctively to Belle the Beautiful.

Polly had heard Belle's share in the encounter between Iron Despard and Wat Tigh enlarged upon in all too glowing terms by one of the "boys," and had mentally called her "that horrid brazen creature;" so it was perhaps as well that Belle did not run the risk of having her agitation betray her secret to the critical glance of her rival.

Moreover, she knew that this man of Iron would pass her without a sign of recognition. Of course there was no reason why he should bow to a woman who had merely served him with wine and cigars; yet, somehow she felt that her great love gave her some claim on him; and she could not endure such an overthrow in the presence of her foe.

But there was more than this to trouble her.

"What was he doing in company with Polly Pettigrew? Would she win him from his pledge to Captain Jack?

"Oh! there is treachery at the bottom of it!" she sighed. "How she looks at him, and leans upon him, as if hurt. But it is a deception to win him through his sympathies—I know it is!"

Then she stopped with a sudden thought, and began to tremble.

"Could they lure him into some trap, and— and—injure him? They are desperate; and there is a great deal of money at stake."

But this was only a passing thought, since, though she believed the judge utterly unscrupulous, it involved greater wickedness on Polly's part than she thought her capable of.

As for Despard's loyalty to his employer, having said that she loved him, we need not add that she had perfect confidence in him.

So, her fears allayed, pain and humiliation again came uppermost. This man who had treated her with such cruel indifference, was showing to her rival the same deference that Tiger Dick had manifested.

Before, the contrast had pierced her heart like a Parthian arrow: now she cowered to the ground, covering her eyes that she might not see, and stopping her ears that she might not hear this bitter, bitter condemnation of her life.

So they passed, unconscious of her vicinity as of her nameless agony; while she lay with her face to the ground, clutching the sod until her delicate fingers were wounded by protruding points of roots, in this wild wrestling of the spirit—alone, forsaken of men, and seemingly of God, until the twilight deepened into night, and stars gemmed the deep blue vault, and the moon sailed as serenely through the fleecy rack as if no human heart was wrung with the torture of the damned!

CHAPTER XIII.

SAMSON SHORN.

WHEN Polly Pettigrew's horse dashed up to the door of her home, Tiger Dick was there in consultation with the judge.

"Good Heavens!" cried the father, at sight of the empty saddle, "my child has been thrown—perhaps killed!"

And he started up with his face white with fear, and drawn with pain.

Tiger Dick, naturally a cooler man, and of course with less at stake, said:

"My dear sir, let us hope that it is not so bad as that. Miss Polly is a capital rider. The animal may have escaped from her while she was dismounted.

Neither stopped to secure the horse, which presently proceeded to nibble the grass that grew in tufts before the house.

The gallant Dick, who had improved his brief acquaintance with his employer's daugh-

ter to such good purpose that he kept informed of most of her movements, knew the direction she had taken, and hence where to go in quest of her.

Within half a mile of the house they came upon her leaning on Iron Despard's arm.

"Back! back! quick! This way!" cried Dick, suddenly; for he, being in advance, had made the discovery.

And he hustled his bewildered companion out of the path and into hiding, behind some rocks and bushes.

"What's the matter?" asked the judge.

"Matter!" replied Dick, guardedly. "Nothing more alarming than a *tete-a-tete* promenade by your daughter and the New Man."

To himself he added:

"Confound the little minx! how she is looking at him!"

"What!" cried Judge Pettigrew, "in the company of that scoundrel?"

"Leaning on his arm with all her accustomed bewitching grace!" replied Dick, coolly.

Judge Pettigrew snorted an oath of rage.

"You forget, my dear sir," said the Tiger, "that she is carrying out our plan sooner than we hoped. Curse her escort to your heart's content. I join you with right good-will." (And aside: "I'll have the rascal's life, if he cuts me out!) But don't forget, meanwhile, to commend her wit."

"I forgot that," whispered the judge, cooling off as to his wrath, and becoming eager with crafty expectation. "What shall we do?"

"Cheese it!" was Tiger Dick's terse recommendation; and he drew his companion closer.

Already the sound of approaching footsteps and voices was audible.

Just as they came opposite, Iron Despard said:

"Here is a fallen pine which will enable you to rest a moment."

"Thanks!" murmured Polly. "You are very considerate. It will be a relief."

And he actually seated her within a couple of rods of her father and Tiger Dick, while he remained standing with his arms folded across his breast—a very soldier-like, yet under the circumstances, a very cold attitude.

But Polly continued to talk, evidently pursuing the theme that had engaged them as they came up.

"Oh, Colonel Dangerfield! you don't know how dull it is in this desolate little camp. You really must take pity on me, and try to make it a little more endurable with your society. How provoking for papa and Captain Digby to choose just this time to fall out over their patrilineal claims, as if there wasn't room enough in these endless mountains for all. But for that, and if there were only a few ladies—real ladies—in the camp, what a pleasant time we could have! Just think of rides through the passes, and picnics on the tops of the peaks, after a jolly scramble up the rocks, and fishing in the brooks, and—and—oh, just everything!"

And with this introduction, Polly launched forth into a stream of small talk, the impulsive witcheries of which were enough to warm any heart but that of the human iceberg upon which she poured, with no perceptible effect, the full flood of her woman's sunshine.

It is safe to say that during those few minutes Judge Pettigrew had such a revelation of his daughter as is accorded to few fathers.

The caressing persistence with which she courted this stranger, whose chilling unresponsiveness, he thought, should have roused her womanly dignity and silenced her tongue, enraged him. His face was purple; his eyes blazed; he ground his teeth. It seemed as if at any moment he might burst forth in uncontrollable violence, and so betray himself, and defeat the plot that was working so smoothly.

But Tiger Dick's grip on his arm restrained him.

As for the Tiger himself, his emotions were complex.

"A unique situation, by the gods!" he reflected, with blended amusement and vexation. "Here I am standing by to see this confounded knave fed with the same lollipop that was dropped into my mouth not an hour ago. And I'll be hanged if she isn't giving him taffy twice to my once! Just bear that, now!"

And he made a wry face at some unusually soft speech that fell from Miss Polly's ruby lips.

"But the gov'nor! Oh, ye gods!"

And his sides ached with suppressed laughter, as he thought of the treat being served up to his patron.

But all things have an end; and presently Polly intimated her readiness to proceed toward home.

When they were gone, Judge Pettigrew ground out between his teeth, with a savage oath:

"I'll have his life!"

"Come, gov'nor," said Dick, with difficulty keeping his face straight. "This is no time for words; but for action. This night our plot will be crowned with success, thanks to the cleverness of your daughter. We must be prepared to complete what she has so nicely begun."

"What are we to do?"

"Have you four men whom you can trust—four men whom money won't buy?"

"Four men whom money won't buy!" repeated the judge, with cynical testiness. "Do you think me a worker of miracles?"

"Two, then?" urged Dick.

"No; nor two."

"One! We can get along with one."

"Not even one! How many such have you seen in your travels in this delectable country?"

Dick laughed.

"It's bad if we haven't one," he said. "We must have at least one."

"But," pursued the judge, "I have men whom my money will buy, and hold, until they see a fair prospect to make more by selling me out."

"Exactly," acquiesced the Tiger. "But that will serve our purpose. Upon reflection, the fewer we let into the secret, the fewer we shall have to watch. By taking a part of the work on ourselves, we can make one man answer as well as fifty. Come on!"

Meanwhile the siren was luring on her intended victim.

Do not suppose that Iron Despard was entirely deceived by her. In the first place, he guessed that most of her pretty suffering was affected. He thought her a coquette who was making the most of a romantic adventure. He was willing to humor her, in the hope that she might divert his mind from a haunting specter that had pursued him ever since he had turned in wrath to discover Belle the Beautiful standing breathless, with eyes distended and lips apart, transfixed by his gaze.

So he conducted the pretty hypocrite to her father's house, and placed her in a low rocking-chair, into which she sank with a sigh of relief.

"Pray be seated in that arm-chair," she said. "It is papa's, and is the most comfortable one in Fool's Luck. You see our house is not pretentious; but we are far enough removed from box and barrel furniture to at least suggest memories of civilized life."

Iron Despard followed her glance about the room. The walls, evidently consisting of the outer boards of the building, were divided into panels by the studding; and it was equally apparent that the ceiling, traversed by joists, was but the under-surface of the flooring of the room above.

Both walls and ceiling were neatly papered, the former being hung with a few unpretentious pictures, and having its windows draped with spotted muslin curtains, overhung by chintz lambrequins. The bare floor was scrubbed to the last degree of cleanliness, and a chintz-covered lounge and three or four straight-backed chairs to match, suggested that their frames had been constructed on the spot, of rough pine, and that their upholstering was a monument of Miss Polly's ingenuity and taste. Only her small rocker, her father's arm-chair and a small melodeon which graced one corner, had been hauled over the mountains from "Frisco." All the little adornments with which woman's magic transforms a mere house into a home, were evidently the work of the deft fingers of the presiding genius of the place—pretty Polly Pettigrew.

Tiger Dick had already complimented her on her little Eden, until her cheeks flushed and her eyes sparkled with pleasure. Iron Despard disappointed and piqued her, by looking around upon it with a face as immobile as an iron mask.

But, displaying nothing of chagrin, she chattered on in her liveliest vein, telling him laughable incidents growing out of their employment of a Chinaman to do the heavier portions of the housework, while she saw to the rest herself.

"We will not wait for papa," she said, having rested a few minutes, "his coming to supper is so uncertain. But we will have our tea at once, and afterward, if you care to hear my poor efforts, I will sing to you."

She thereupon arose and went into the next room, leaving the door open, that their talk might not be interrupted.

Iron Despard saw a kitchen as neat as the room in which he sat, and watched her quickening the fire and putting the tea to draw.

Then she returned to him, and limping slightly, yet not so much as to mar the grace of her movements, deftly removed books and lamp and worsted cover from the round table that stood in the center of the room, and laid a snowy cloth and arranged a *tete-a-tete* tea-service of dainty china.

Then came bread, cut in thin slices and piled symmetrically, nut-brown as to its crust and creamy-white as to its porous interior, and yellow butter and golden cakes, and tarts—quivering morsels of jelly on mere flakes of pastry, and—

But hark! She is telling Iron Despard how she "absolutely refused to come to camp if she wasn't permitted to have a cow of her own," and of the fun of teaching Wing Lee to milk. And upon learning that he likes both cream and sugar in his tea, she invites him to come and see her skim the rich surface from one of her

broad milk-pans, that were polished to a mirror brightness.

How her eyes flashed, how her teeth gleamed, as she laughed, and her cheeks were the color of apple-blossoms.

One who knew her well would have seen that her exhilaration was feverish, but Iron Despard involuntarily yielded to her almost child-like sprightliness, and unbent somewhat in spite of himself.

She indicated his seat at the table, and placed herself opposite. Then she poured the amber tea and passed it to him with a hand that trembled perceptibly.

She talked and laughed incessantly, but her lips quivered, and her eyes dilated, and she could hardly suppress a gasp and an involuntary effort to restrain him every time he raised his cup to his lips.

Still she pressed a second cup upon him, and as if to set him the example, drank her own tea almost convulsively.

Then, saying that she could remove the tea things later, when it would not be at the expense of the pleasure of his society, she offered to sing to him.

Iron Despard arose from the table with a feeling of weariness, so that when the easy-chair had been moved nearer the melodeon, he sunk into it with a sigh of comfort.

Then she began to sing, and what the instrument lacked in harmony was amply compensated by the sweetness of her voice. But there was a frightened quiver in it that added pathos to the tender ballad she chose.

Iron Despard listened to her with a growing dreaminess. The music seemed to grow fainter and to recede to a distance. Then it changed its character. He thought that he was in a vast cathedral, where the choristers, as they chanted, marched from the chancel through a Gothic-arched doorway, their voices sounding fainter and more heavenly, until the closing of the door behind them left the holy strain to die into solemn silence.

Polly Pettigrew started from her place with a low cry of dismay.

His chin rested on his breast; his hands hung limp; his eyes were only half closed, like those of a drowned man, while his stertorous breathing showed that he had been drugged.

A moment the girl gazed at her work with dilated eyes and bloodless lips, then in sudden panic she fled from the house out into the night.

CHAPTER XIV.

WHAT WAS TO BECOME OF HIM?

POLLY PETTIGREW was thoroughly terrified by what she had done. She felt like a murderer; and her one frantic impulse was to get away from the horrible thing her hands had made.

"Oh, if he should die—if he should die!" escaped from her white and quivering lips.

And with a vague purpose of finding her father and having him apply restoratives to undo the mischief, she rushed bareheaded out of the house into the darkness.

It was not late enough for the nightly carousals to have begun to make the darkness hideous with harsh sounds; but the lights that gleamed in the direction of the center of the camp showed that the saloons and dance-houses were in readiness for their patrons.

But Polly had taken scarcely a dozen steps from the door, when she rushed into the arms of no less a person than Tiger Dick.

He clapped his hand over her mouth in time to intercept her scream of terror, and then spoke to her guardedly.

"Miss Pettigrew, hush! hush, for Heaven's sake! It is I, Dick!"

She recognized him, and clinging to him, cried:

"Oh, come! quick! I am afraid that I have killed him! What shall I do?—what shall I do? Oh! oh!"

"Nonsense!" exclaimed the Tiger. "You have done gloriously! I have been watching you through the window, the curtain of which was imperfectly drawn. Here is your father. He will assure you that it is all right."

She then discerned the judge close at hand, and let go of Dick with a quickness that made him laugh to himself.

"Oh, papa!" she cried, going up to him.

But he put her off testily.

"There! there! Don't detain us. There is more to do before the matter is perfected. You needn't follow us into the house for a few minutes, if you choose."

"But you are not going to—to—harm him! Indeed! indeed!"

"Nonsense, child!"

And he broke away from her detaining hands.

"Oh, Mr. Langley!" was her next appeal.

And the Tiger, gentler than her irascible parent, who was always enraged at the necessity of committing open villainy, took both her hands, and assured her:

"Not a hair of his head, believe me, dear Miss Pettigrew! Do you suppose that I would involve you in a crime, even if your father would consent?"

"And he is only to be detained without injury, until the trouble is over!"

"Only until we have secured your father's rights. You see that we shall be doing him no wrong, but only preventing him from doing us a mischief."

"You promise me that he shall be cared for?"

"With all my heart. And now, excuse me."

He turned to follow her father; but she accompanied him, still tremulous with apprehension.

Entering the house, they carefully drew the curtain through which the Tiger had made his observations.

Ten Dick turned to examine his rival, while Polly waited in breathless suspense.

"He's very nicely fixed," he said, in his light, off-hand way, "good for all night and a right smart slice out of to morrow. Judge, let me be the first to congratulate you on the possession of a first class mine in the near future and of a charming daughter in the actual present. May the latter soon bring happiness to some other man, as she has brought luck to you."

Although he spoke to the father, he bowed to the daughter; and his speech was not lost on the latter, in spite of her agitation, and though the former ignored it, and said:

"This is no place to leave him. Help me to carry him into the next room."

They lifted the unconscious man, chair and all, and carrying him into Judge Pettigrew's chamber, which opened directly out of the living-room, laid him on the bed, loosing his cravat. Then, closing the door, they left him in the darkness.

"And now," said Dick, "there is one possible weak point in our scheme, which it is well to be advised on, so as to be on our guard if necessary. Did you meet any one while in company with the colonel? And, by the way, how was it that your horse got away from you?"

Polly had somewhat recovered her composure by this time; so she gave them quite a spirited account of her adventure, adding:

"We didn't meet a soul on our way to the house. I thought of that, and was on pins and needles lest some awkward fellow should happen along just in time to play marplot."

Dick was profuse in his praises of her wit and pluck. But for the presence of her father, he would probably have expressed his jealousy at Iron Despard's having caught her in his arms.

As it was the judge cut him short.

"We are not secure yet," he said. "I would suggest the wisdom of taking precautions against any approach to the house while he is here."

"Just what was on my mind," said Dick, coolly. "It might be well to put out the light and guard the house on the outside, until Rogers makes his appearance."

"Oh, but I can't sit in here alone in the dark!" cried Polly, turning pale at the thought. "I should die of nervousness. I feel as if there were a corpse in the house! I can't stay alone."

"By no means, Miss Pettigrew. I counted on your company to relieve the tedium of our watch, as it will be until midnight at least. The night is quite warm; and there is no dew to speak of."

"Well," said Polly, hesitatingly, "that won't be so bad."

"Decidedly not!" was Dick's mental corroboration; and he laughed internally at what he considered Polly's happy way of putting it.

His plan was carried out; and the three took up their position on a bench which stood in front of the house, in such deep shadow that, as the saying is, one could scarcely see one's hand before one's face.

Polly sat between her father and Dick, quite close to the latter, be it recorded, and when he slyly possessed himself of her hand, did not withdraw it.

The judge observed a morose silence, unless directly addressed; but Polly and Dick conversed in guarded whispers, and whilst had a very enjoyable flirtation, which derived piquancy from the close yet bootless vicinity of the lady's natural guardian.

At the appointed time Bill Rogers made his appearance, and Dick took him in hand for examination.

The moment he got him to the light his flushed appearance confirmed what the quick eye and ear of the Tiger had detected in his gait, in the darkness.

"You have been drinking!" said the examiner, sternly.

"Waal, boss," pleaded Rogers, "that ain't no crime in this hyar country, is it? I'm my own man yit."

And to prove it, he straightened up, and stood steadily.

"We don't want any fuddled brains in this business," said Dick. "The whole success of it may depend on your continuing to be 'your own man,' as you say. Now I propose to secure that result by keeping temptation out of your way. Have you a flask in your pocket?"

"Jest a mite of a one, boss."

"Hand it to me."

Rogers looked dismayed.

"See hyar, gov'nor," he pleaded, "ye wouldn't go fur to—"

"I am going to put you on a strict regimen of unadulterated spring-water until this business is over," was the implacable announcement.

"It'll poison me, general, sure's ye're born. Human nater won't stan' it!"

"How much did we promise you if this thing went through?"

"A hundred dollars down, besides my reg'lar wages."

"Do you make a clean hundred every week?"

"Waal, no—can't say that I do."

"Very well; if you see an easier way of making it the coming week, throw up this job and go at the other."

Rogers stood shifting his weight from one foot to another, deliberating what was plainly no easy problem. The longer he pondered the more unpromising the situation seemed to grow, and he sighed dismally.

"Time—time!" called Dick.

Rogers started, and then looked at him appealingly.

"Yell give me just one more nip, boss?"

"Not another drop! You've had too much already."

"Honor bright, between man and man, I'm as stiddy as a judge," still urged Rogers.

"The whisky, or git?"

"It's dog gone hard!" sighed Rogers; and the reluctance with which he drew the flask from his pocket and surrendered it, was ample confirmation of his words.

Had Dick only known what would be the result of this too rigid discipline! But for once, in the love of exercising his iron will, he over-reached himself.

A board was then got, and the unconscious Iron Despard stretched upon it on his back.

"Oh, what are you going to do?" cried Polly, to whom these preparations had an ominous look.

"Take our prize to a place of safe-keeping," answered the Tiger, cheerfully.

"Take him away from the house? You did not tell me of this."

"Don't detain us, child!" said her father again, sternly. "Must we go over all of the details with you? Your share in the matter is done."

Thus chid, Polly drew back. But she looked frightened; there were tears in her eyes, and she wrung her hands.

She looked as if she longed to appeal to Dick, if she had dared further to oppose her father's will. But Dick was busy shouldering one end of the burden, while Rogers shouldered the other.

So, accompanied by the judge, they marched out into the night.

Polly followed them out of the house, and then peered after them as they were swallowed up by the darkness.

Long after all sound of their guarded steps had died away she stood there shivering, afraid to obey her father's parting command to go into the house and to bed.

But regrets were now vain—she had done her share, and the matter had passed out of her hands.

CHAPTER XV.

A MISSING MAN.

On the following day it became apparent that there was something amiss in the Little Lucky ranks. Captain Jack kept moving about, holding consultations in odd corners, with a look of anxiety deepening as the day advanced.

"It can't be that he has deserted us!" he said, for the hundredth time, to his mine-boss, Lige Bigelow.

"I wouldn't take it so, Cap," replied honest Lige. "He don't look like that kind of a fish."

"Then what has become of him?"

"That's what we'd all like to know."

"If Pettigrew has bought him up—"

"Hold hard, Cap!"

"But why ain't he on hand? He knows that we can't afford to lose a single man. Time's money!"

"Keep yer shirt on, Cap. He'll turn up before night. He may be gettin' p'ints on 'em now."

"He should keep me posted as to his moves. As it is, everything's at a standstill."

"Maybe he seen his chance an' went fur it, without time to give you the wink."

Lige was evidently determined to look on the hopeful side; but Captain Jack was not satisfied.

He went to the Bower again, for the hundredth time.

"Has Colonel Dangerfield been hyer any time to-day?" he asked.

"No," replied Belle the Beautiful, with a start.

"Isn't he at the Little Lucky?"

Captain Jack turned away, as if he had not heard her question.

Her heart began to beat violently. The apprehensions of the night before came flocking back like the birds of evil omen.

"Oh! can anything have happened to him?" she murmured. "If there has, it is the work of that treacherous Tiger! His crafty smile haunts me."

That night it was generally known that Iron Despard had been seen by no one since the day before, and speculation ran high as to his whereabouts and what he was doing.

"Gents," declared one of the patrons of the

Bower, raising his voice above the general hub-bub, as one who sought to make himself conspicuous, "you may all have your opinions. I've got mine, an' I give it to ye as free as the air ye breathe an' the water ye drink. It's jest this: Iron Despard's layin' low!"

This rather oracular speech was uttered with impressive deliberateness, the speaker looking as if it covered a mine of undeveloped knowledge.

He was at once besieged with a running fire of eager questions, to all of which he vouchsafed but one answer:

"Ye byear me, gents? Iron Despard's layin' low!"

But this theory did not satisfy Sassy Sam.

"What fur would Iron Despard lay low when Tiger Dick is goin' in tooth an' toe-nail? Jest look at Captain Jack. He's clean flibbergasted! I tell ye, boys, things ain't straight."

"Then what has become of him?"

"Waal, I say that a man what gits pitched through a winder don't forget it in a hurry."

"Teddy the Teaser!" cried half a dozen, in a breath.

"Co-rect!"

"Sao! Iron Despard 'ud break hin' in two!"

"Ef he got the chaine, sonny! How ef he come at him from behind a rock? Click!—ping! Good-day, Mr. Iron Despard!"

He imitated the cocking and firing of a revolver with his fingers with dramatic effect.

All were impressed. The scene of treachery arose before their imaginations as clearly as if enacted before their gaze.

Belle the Beautiful could scarcely prevent her face from betraying her agitation, but she put some emissary of Tiger Dick in the place of Teddy the Teaser, whom she believed too cowardly to do anything more than bluster.

Of course this theory that Iron Despard had been "spirited away" by the Pretty Polly party—was urged by many; but it was scouted by the accused, who yet rejoiced openly over the crippling of their opponents.

"Opinions differs," cried Banty Collins, "but it's money as talks; an' my money says that when this pan is washed you'll find Teddy the Teaser in the bottom. Come, gents!—put up, or shut up!"

And shaking a buckskin bag of coins over his head, he made his way through the crowd shouting:

"Dust down! dust down! What! no takers? Make it two to one. Don't all speak at once. Two to one that the Teaser has got his work in on the New Man!"

He got up a great commotion and abundance of loud talk, so that it seemed as if a general fight was imminent; but with nice tact he kept on the verge of a row without getting into it.

All knew that he was a Pretty Polly man; but none suspected that Tiger Dick had sent him out with money to turn the tide of public sentiment toward the theory of the Teaser's revenge.

After he had effected several bets at odds, he went among his own party; and soon a lot of them set off to return with loud yells and cheers, bearing resinous pine boughs with which to start a bonfire—this also in pursuance of Tiger Dick's instructions.

But the Little Luckyites could ill brook such a demonstration, and made a move to frustrate it.

The Pretty Polly party formed a ring about their growing pile of pine boughs, and awaited with hand on revolver to defend it from a rush on the part of their opponents.

Savage oaths and bitter taunts were exchanged; and it seemed as if the application of the match to the inflammable pile must precipitate a bloody conflict.

Strolling about in his cool, unconcerned way, Tiger Dick came upon Captain Jack Digby.

"Well, how do you find yourself, my Christian friend?" was his cheerful greeting.

"As usual, thank you," was Captain Jack's rather short reply.

But Tiger Dick was imperturbable.

"Glad to hear it. There's no man I wish better luck than Captain Jack Digby. But what is all this talk about the disappearance of your New Man?"

"Talk is cheap," replied Captain Jack, trying to assume an indifferent air. "But as long as I don't find fault, my friends needn't feel no concern in the matter."

"Ah! you're a sly dog!" cried the Tiger, smiling as if he suspected the other of a cunning trick. "Now I suppose you've got him snugged away somewhere, laying a mine that will blow us all sky-high!"

"That's your lookout. Of course you're not looking for me to give away points in my own game."

"Oh, no! you're too fly for that. But—Hello! This won't do!"

A tongue of flame shot up, revealing the surging crowd about the bonfire; and the welkin rung with the yells that greeted it from the Pretty Polly party and the wrathful groans of the Little Luckyites.

"We don't want any collision," said Dick. "Will you go with me and put a stop to this thing?"

Captain Jack could not do less than comply with this conciliatory overture; but he did not calculate on Dick's familiarly linking arms with him, and so marching him forward where all could see their strange association.

"Hold on, gentlemen!" cried Dick, attracting every eye by his stentorian voice. "This is all wrong. Neither Captain Digby nor Judge Pettigrew (whom I have the honor to represent) desire any such hostility between their friends. Let us have a manly fight, if it comes to that, which God forbid; but let us have no unseemly rejoicing over the misfortune of our opponents. My men, scatter those pine boughs. We will have no bonfire to-night."

And so perfect was the control he had established over them, that the men who were prepared to resist the revolvers of the rival party yielded at his word, and stamped out the fire they had just started—albeit they grumbled some and looked sulky.

But Dick ignored this natural display of chagrin. He commanded men's actions, caring nothing for their feelings.

"Don't take a man to task for making a wry face over humble pie—so long as he eats it!" was his philosophy.

"And now, gents," he said, "there's nothing for restoring good-fellowship like taking a 'smile' all round. My good friend, Captain Digby, here, will set the example to his men. Come, boys! no malice!"

And he led the way to the Bower, still marching Captain Jack by the arm.

The proprietor of the Little Lucky "hated it like pizen," but Tiger Dick was not an easy man to resist, either in his good-nature or in his hostility.

With the countenance of their leader the men were not likely to refuse good liquor; so the Bower was soon packed, the hostile parties mingling indiscriminately.

To Belle the Beautiful this looked more and more portentous.

"Oh, how subtle a man!" she murmured. "He carries everything his own way. He will win over Captain Jack's men until they won't oppose him with any heart. The Little Lucky is lost!"

Tiger Dick read her fears.

He addressed her cheerfully.

"You can't say that I don't bring grist to your mill," he said. "Oh, I mean to win my bet!"

"I would rather go without it," she replied, "than that you should have such occasion for bringing it."

"What!" he cried, with affected astonishment, "isn't it a good thing to reconcile these fellows, who seem determined to get by the ears on all occasions? 'Blessed are the peacemakers!' What fault have you to find with that?"

She made no reply; and he regarded her with twinkling eyes.

"It is his work," she said to herself; "and he knows that I see through him. Oh, what can I do to save—him?—if it is not already too late!"

That night sleep forsook her pillow. She rolled and tossed in thought as futile as troubled, until the dawn was heralded by the carol of birds. Then she fell into a deep sleep, from which she woke with a start, to leap upright in bed. Beads of sweat stood on her forehead, and a smothered cry was on her lips. She remembered no dream; but somehow in her sleep had come to her what she believed to be a solution of the mystery.

In a twinkling she was out of bed, and had thrown on her clothes. Then the broad sunlight, which was better calculated to bring cheer, dismayed her.

"Oh, I can do nothing, absolutely nothing, until night!" she murmured. "How can I wait idly all these hours? And what may not happen between now and then, not counting the precious time already lost! Oh, De—"

His name trembled on her lips; but she checked it with a sob.

And much was to happen before she could put her purpose into execution, to the narration of which let us lasten.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE TEASER "IN A HOLE."

TEDDY the Teaser was a coward. In the idiom of the mountains, he was "all mouth and no heart."

He had no intention of carrying out his menace against Iron Despard. On the contrary, one look at that gentleman satisfied him that he didn't want to "call that hand."

To save his dignity, then, he resolved to leave Fool's Luck, and did so forthwith.

We next find him pushing his fortunes in that red-hot little camp, Tenstrike.

Opposite him, Chet Brockwith has just placed his cigar beside his whisky-glass, so that the lighted end clears the edge of the table, as he says:

"Boss, I see you, and go ten better."

Without a word, Teddy the Teaser puts his pile into the pot. Then he says:

"Make ur break, pard. How's yer sand?"

"Ef thar's a nigger in that wood-pile, out he comes," says Chet. "I think I smell a bluff." And "seeing" Teddy's pile, he calls for a sight.

Teddy the Teaser "shows up" a full.

Chet pans out four—one spots!

"Bu'sted, by thunder!" is Teddy's only comment.

"Take somethin'," invites Chet, smilingly "raking" the pot.

Teddy looks longingly at the money, as it is transferred into Chet's buckskin pouch, and stowed away "whar no investigating committee can get at it," and with a sigh, as Chet makes no move to leave him the customary stake "for luck," steps up and takes his "bitters."

Then he goes out into the world, to meditate on his fallen fortunes.

An hour ago he was a gentleman of leisure. Now he is—what?

"Bull-whackin' ag'in?" he asked himself, as he sat disconsolately on a boulder. "Hang bull-whackin'!—I've had a dose lately. One, two, three—Less'n a week, by thunder!—an' every stiver gone up the flume! Ef I only had one more stake, I could clean out that mean skeecks! Never left me a shiner to toss up fur luck—blast him!"

But the question which pressed for immediate solution was how to mend his fortunes. Must he return to work when his holiday had but just begun?

The devil was promptly at his elbow with the suggestion that he "take to the road to make a raise," and loth to admit his lack of courage even to himself, Teddy the Teaser roamed among the pine-shadowed ravines, picking out favorable spots to stop the stage, or better, some solitary traveler.

So absorbed did he become enacting—in imagination—all sorts of deeds of prowess, that he did not observe that he was going toward Fool's Luck. And some rocks favorable for an ambuscade catching his eye, he left the road, and secreted himself among them, dodging in and out, as if on the alert for some approaching victim.

In the midst of this silly diversion, he suddenly stopped with a cry of surprise. He had actually stumbled over a pouch with that in it which gave forth an unmistakable metallic jingle.

Trembling with eagerness, he opened it. At sight of the contents he uttered an exultant:

"Hooray!"

Then he danced a jig to the accompaniment of the jingling coins as he shook the bag.

With sudden fear lest he attract the notice of the owner, perchance returning in search of his lost treasure, he hid himself, peering about in every direction, while he clutched the bag with dogged resolve not to let it go.

But no one appeared, and his assurance returning, he betook himself again to Tenstrike, and sought out Chet Brockwith for his revenge.

"I'm fur ye, boss!" was his salutation.

"I'm yer man," responded Chet, nothing loth. "I'd jest as lieve clean you out as anybody I know. Made another raise?"

"How's that fur music?" asked Teddy, shaking the pouch triumphantly before his face.

"Borrowed it o' some tenderfoot on the road, I reckon," suggested Chet.

For reply, Teddy pulled his eye down and the corner of his mouth up in a most formidable wink.

"Mum's the word, cully!" he said, and assumed a swagger in his walk as became one who was "a bad man to meet on a dark night."

"It's my turn to set 'em up," said Chet, who knew the advantage of having his adversary "cheerful."

But the Teaser was coy. He had been drunk when he was "cleaned out" the last time. Now his head was as clear as a bell, and he meant to keep it so while he wooed the goddess of fortune.

However, he affected to be "jubilant."

"No limit, an' no back-down till t'other or which is scooped," he proposed.

"Agreed," was Chet's ready assent.

Then they shuffled, and cut, and dealt, and discarded, and drew—saw, went better, and called, with varying fortunes, until, in the end, Chet Brockwith leaned back and said:

"Dead-broke!"

"Pardner," said Teddy, magnanimously. "I'm sorry to take yer money, blow me ef I ain't! Hyar's a stake, an' better luck next time."

Chet scowled and forgot to say "thank you," as he profited by the generosity of the victor. He held malice against the man who, in his turn, had been favored by luck.

He was soon to have a chance to "come back at him" in a "low-down" way.

Teddy the Teaser was now as gay as a lark. He "set 'em up all round," and then made a bee-line for a dance-house, where a certain black-eyed houri threw her fascinations around him, and thenceforth held his purse-strings.

Chet Brockwith left Tenstrike in disgust, and turned up in Fool's Luck on the second day following Iron Despard's disappearance.

He found the most intense excitement prevalent, and had the good sense to keep his mouth shut while he "took it all in."

"A man missin' yesterday," he mused, "an' odds offered that Teddy the Teaser has paid off an old grudge. Ah! oho! that accounts fur our gay an' festive friend bein' suddenly in funds! Maybe thar's somethin' in this, an' Chet Brockwith's the boy to work it fur all it's worth."

A little inquiry drew out the whole story, for everybody was ready, and even eager to talk.

Then Chet took time to deliberate who would be most likely to "come down" for what information he had to give. He decided upon Judge Pettigrew, and hunted him up.

"I understand, boss," he said, "that a man on the other side has turned up among the missin'."

"Well?" asked the judge, watchfully.

"An' the boys is layin' odds that a galoot named Teddy the Teaser was at his takin'-off."

"What's that to me?"

And the judge frowned angrily.

"Beg yer pardon, judge, but was the Teaser one o' your men?"

"What the deuce is that to you? What have you come here for?" shouted the judge.

"Take it coolly, gov'nor," said Chet, not at all abashed. "Ef he's your man, it might be worth somethin' to you to keep him out o' the hands o' the Little Luckyites. When a galoot gits a hemp necktie on, he's apt to hedge fur number one, even ef he has to squeal on his friends. Captain Jack wouldn't want no such coyote as Teddy the Teaser, ye understand, if he could get his thumb on the boss grizzly that put that dirty leetle cuss up to his work. Suppose the Teaser saved his own skin by sellin' y-u out!—hey!"

Judge Pettigrew did not answer immediately. He sat pondering, with set teeth and a frown of savage impatience.

Chet Brockwith misunderstood this hesitation. He thought he "bad" his man. Thereupon he elevated his feet on the corner of the table with cool insolence, and tilting back in his chair, said:

"Take yer time, judge. Don't do nothin' rash."

Judge Pettigrew was not the man to stand this.

"Confound your impudence!" he shouted, springing to his feet in ungovernable wrath. "Take yourself out of this office, or I'll throw you out!"

Chet Brockwith leisurely took his feet down, and said with undisturbed deliberation:

"All right, boss. Ef you ain't puttin' no money into the thing, all you've got to do is to say so. I hope to have a hand in your hangin' in a day or two."

And with that quiet shot he took himself out of the office as directed.

Immediately Judge Pettigrew was filled with misgivings.

"Have I done wisely? Confound my temper! It always gets the best of me. Where's Langley? I must see him at once!"

He ran out, and actually called after Chet.

"Hold on," he said. "Perhaps I was hasty. I may be able to make terms with you yet."

"All right, judge," replied Chet, as imperious as before. "You'll find me an easy man to get along with. Only treat me like a gentleman."

And he walked back into the office, sat down, and returned his feet to the table as before.

Judge Pettigrew frowned, but let the offensive liberty pass unreproved.

He then sent a messenger in quest of the Tiger, with instructions that Dick was not to come to the office, but to wait at the shaft-house, the judge receiving a signal of his attendance.

It was no part of Tiger Dick's business to attend to the mining in person. Like a general he had organized his men, and they were at work below ground "like nailers," as the saying is, taking advantage of the crippled condition of their opponents. Meanwhile Dick himself strolled at will through the camp, watching the ebb and flow of public sentiment.

He found Belle the Beautiful behind her bar, her extreme pallor and nervous agitation confirming his suspicions of her love for Iron Despard; but she parried his questions with a woman's wit, until the summons of the judge relieved her of his presence.

Having repaired to the engine-house in the most leisurely manner, he stood paring his nails while the judge nervously poured forth his account of the new move in the game.

"Um! Is that all?" he observed, when the judge was done. "Well, give the fellow our compliments, and permission to go to To-phet."

"Bnt," urged the judge, "if the cowboy falls into the hands of the mob they will hang him; and though you may be indifferent to such a trifles, I prefer not to have on my hands the blood of a man who has done me no harm. But that isn't the worst of it. If he hangs, we can never restore Iron Despard. We will be asked why we let an innocent man die, when a worl from us would have saved him."

"An ugly question, truly," observed Dick, with a shrug.

"So it's the mine against a double murder. Won't it pay us better to keep this man out of the way?"

"There's always two ways of looking at a thing," said Dick, argumentatively. "Here's my view. When hard pressed, throw a sop to the wolves. If we let the Little Luckyites amuse themselves with this fellow, they won't be nosing about our tracks. That suits us exactly."

"But I tell you they'll hang him."

"Oh, no! The execution of mob-law requires a certain organization or tolerable unanimity of sentiment. We can stave off the hanging until we are ready to release our prisoner, and show how the trick was done. I'll take the responsibility of this thing, my dear sir."

Still Judge Pettigrew looked anxious and undecided.

"Perhaps you had better see the fellow," he suggested.

"Where is he?"

"In the office."

"All right. Drive ahead."

And he followed his employer without interest and without reluctance.

As they entered, Chet Brockwith, busying himself with scraping a spatter of mud off his breeches with his finger-nail, did not take the trouble to look up. His legs still rested on the corner of the table.

Tiger Dick lifted his foot and pushed them off as unconcernedly as if this were an ordinary proceeding among gentlemen.

Surprise and anger appeared in Chet's face, as he now looked up with a start. But the oath died on his lips as he met the cool, inquiring look in Dick's eyes. He recognized his master at a glance.

"That's all right, boss. Beg pardon," he said, bowing and smiling, and straightening himself round for business.

Tiger Dick walked back to the door, opened it, and stepping aside, said:

"Good-morning, sir!"

"But, gov'nor—"

"Good-morning, I say!"

The tones were perfectly quiet.

Chet looked at the speaker, puzzled by his manner.

Dick waited unmoved.

But there could be no mistaking his inflexible purpose.

"All right, boss.. It's your put."

And rising, Chet walked out.

When he was gone Dick said to his employer: "Never let a man walk over you, no matter what it costs to sit down on him."

Judge Pettigrew thought that they might have to pay dear for their whistle, but he said nothing. He could not but be impressed by Dick's perfect self-confidence.

Meanwhile Chet Brockwith next sought Captain Jack.

Jack Digby was not a mere money-grubber. He liked success; he liked popularity; he hated to be outdone, but stronger than these was the sentiment of loyalty to a friend.

He had "cottoned to" Iron Despard from the first, and brief as had been their association he was ready to let his mining interests stand until he had avenged any injury to one whom he believed to be a "square" man.

"Stranger," he said to Chet at once, "if you can show me the man that has cut the dirt from under Iron Despard's feet, I'll plank a sweet hundred!"

"It's a go!" was Chet's acceptance. "Detail me a leetle posse of men, enough to make a respectable show at Tenstrike, an' we'll give the Teaser a chancie to tell how he raised the dust, anyway. Ef he can give it to us straight, you're nothing out, my friend."

"I'll head the party myself," said Captain Jack. "An' I'd like to see the son of a Tenstriker that will stop me from snaking him out of that!"

He was as good as his word. Leaving Lige Bigelow in charge of the mine, he selected a score of men and set out for Tenstrike.

The local government of Fool's Luck was of the most primitive sort. Captain Jack, as the first citizen of the place, held the office of Referee by a sort of tacit consent. His powers were similar to those of the alcalde of the early California towns. That is to say, he was judge, jury and executioner in all cases short of capital offenses, and even in the latter he had the preponderance of influence, though the whole camp sat in the jury-box. So he went to Tenstrike with the dignity of a sheriff.

It was not difficult to find Teddy the Teaser. He was in a dance-house, tilting back in his chair, with his feet on a table among the glasses and bottles, and a painted and bedizened Jezebel on either side of him. It is perhaps needless to add that he was jovially drunk.

He saw and recognized Chet Brockwith first, and shaking his pouch of coins, shouted:

"Hello, ole pard! How's yer sand? Made a raise? I'm in clover! Come over! come over! Take one o' these hyer hussies off my hands, and help yourself to liquor."

"That's Iron Despard's pouch!" cried one of

Captain Jack's men, guardedly. "Look at the fringe!"

And others recognized it at once.

"He's yer man, Cap!" asked Chet, exultantly.

"He is!" declared Captain Jack.

And walking over to the inebriate, he clapped his hand on his shoulder with no gentle touch, announcing:

"You're my prisoner!"

The women screamed. Teddy the Teaser swore and struggled. In an instant the room was in confusion, and local pride manifested itself.

All the Tenstrikers sided with the Teaser, and demanded of Captain Jack by what right he arrested one of their townsmen.

CHAPTER XVII.

DRAGGED TO THE GALLows.

THOUGH the indignant Tenstrikers swarmed about him like bees, with no stint of loud and profane expostulations, Captain Jack stood his ground, keeping a firm grip on the collar of his prisoner.

"Hold on, gents," he cried. "This hyar's all reg'lar. I arrest Teddy the Teaser for the robbery and murder of Colonel Despard Dangerfield! Maybe some o' you know me. I'm Jack Digby, o' Fool's Luck. He'll have a fair trial; but he's got to toe the scratch."

Murder! Robbery! For a moment Teddy stood dumb with amazement. The seriousness of the charge sobered him; but he could not gather his wits all at once.

Chet Brockwith saw a chance to put in an effective word.

"It's all straight, boys," he said. "The galoot owned up to me yestid'y. He left hyar as empty as a bag of wind, and come back, inside of twenty-four hours, as well-fixed as if he'd been to Congress!"

Teddy the Teaser began to shake until his teeth fairly chattered with fear.

"Gentlemen! gentlemen!" he pleaded. "I swar I never seen Iron Despard—"

He was interrupted by a volley of oaths from the Little Lucky men.

"Never seen Iron Despard! Why, the liar was piched through the winder by him, less'n a week ago!"

In vain Teddy tried to explain that, if they had waited for the conclusion of his sentence, they would have learned that all he set out to deny was having seen the supposed murdered man since the night of his memorable encounter.

Captain Jack had dispossessed him of the fatal pouch, and now, holding it up to view, cried:

"Gents, you all recognize this? I have seen Iron Despard pay his score out of it a dozen times."

This was vociferously confirmed on all sides, and a groan of condemnation added.

As many as could get hold of the luckless Teddy seized him, as if there was danger of his offering a desperate resistance, though, truth to tell, his pluck had long ago oozed from every pore; and he was hustled out of the room, his faint efforts to make himself heard being hushed by black scowls and savage threats.

A man might commit manslaughter in a fair fight, and not lose social standing in Tenstrike; but murder for the purpose of robbery was viewed in quite another light. So those who through jealousy of a rival "city," would have defended him on any other charge, now fell away from the helpless Teaser, leaving him to his fate.

The march to Fool's Luck was a tumultuous one, Teddy being hurried rapidly forward between two burly captors, and with a third at his back, while the crowd, largely recruited from Tenstrike's enterprising citizens, who went to see the "doin's," surged ahead like a herd of stampeding buffaloes.

Night had already settled down over the camp when they came in sight of its twinkling lights.

With men of that kind nothing important can be accomplished without a general "hurrah-boys;" so the Little Luckyites had prepared for a triumphal entry.

Rude torches, merely resinous pine knots, had been prepared; and now, at the command of Captain Jack, they were ignited.

The rich wood threw off volumes of dense black smoke, and its ruddy blaze made the roughly-dressed, unkempt miners look like a troop of satyrs.

"Now rouse 'em out, boys!" cried Captain Jack.

And his men set up a yell that made the rocks ring again, and fired their revolvers into the air in a rattling salute.

Instantly doors flew open, and the saloons and dance-houses belched their tenants into the street. The pine boughs that had been collected by the partisans of the Pretty Polly, as a taunt to their opponents, were now fired by the Little Luckyites, and filled the camp with lurid light.

Gastly pale, and with dropped jaw and distended eyes, Teddy the Teaser shrunk from the vengeful looks, wrathful curses of the men who thronged about him, thirsting for his blood.

It seemed to him that every man's hand was against him, and that their fury would leave

him no opportunity even to protest that he was without offense.

A rope was put round his neck, and the other end paid out through the crowd, amid which a furious scuffle ensued, every one trying to get hold of it.

Then with wilder yells and ever wilder, as the mob lashed itself into a rage, they rushed toward the center of the camp, those near the prisoner having to hold back on the rope to prevent him from being choked to death.

Their way lay past Judge Pettigrew's house; and Polly ran out to see the cause of such intense excitement.

She could distinguish nothing in the surging mass of men, until one whom she knew chanced to pass on the outskirts of the crowd.

"What is the matter, Joe?" she cried, catching him by the arm.

He stopped in his headlong course, gazed at her, recognized her, and then answered:

"Obl it's you, Miss Polly!"

"Yes! yes!" she answered, impatiently.

"What is the meaning of all this turmoil?"

"It's the Teaser. They've got him."

"The Teaser? Who is he? What has he done?"

"Lord! don't you know? Knocked the New Man over. Let daylight into his back, most likely."

"Shot Colonel Dangerfield?"

A spasm darted to her heart. The blood fled from her lips.

Her companion noticed nothing of this.

"Yes," he replied, excitedly. "There he is! Don't you see him? There among the torches—bareheaded. They've got the halter on him already. You can't see it; but it runs out away ahead there. There's a hundred ahead of it."

"Where is he? I don't see him!" cried Polly.

"Hear—git up on this stump. Thar!—don't you see the white-livered cuss jest by Captain Jack?"

Her strained eyes caught sight of him now. She shuddered and clasped her tremulous hands. She had never seen such a horror-stricken face before.

"Oh!" she cried, "something must be done to save him! He is innocent!"

"The deuce he is!" cried Joe. "An' maybe he come by Iron Despard's pouch by accident. An' maybe he was slingin' Iron Despard's money around, all the time a-thinkin' it was his own. Oh, yes!"

Polly turned to look at the speaker, a sudden suspicion darting an arrow of pain through her heart.

Had her father employed Teddy the Teaser to make way with the man who was most prejudicial to his interests?

Before she could open her lips to speak further she heard her father's voice saying sternly:

"Polly, what are you doing here? This is no place for you. Return to the house instantly."

"Oh, papa!" she cried, leaping down from the stump and seizing his arm. "Is that man guilty? Has he killed—"

"Hush!" he hissed into her ear, with a look on his face that made her heart stand still.

Then, clutching her arm with a grip that hurt her, he hurried her back to the house, and actually forced her into a chair.

"Do you hear me?" he cried, his face so distorted by passion that he was hardly recognizable. "You are not to stir from here, nor to exchange a single word with any one on this subject until I give you leave."

While she stared at him breathless, he was gone, slamming the door after him.

A sudden panic of horror seized her. She saw herself a murderer by indirection. Dropping her face on the table she stopped her ears with her fingers to shut out the awful sounds that told of the peril of another life.

While she crouched thus the door opened, and a heavy step betrayed the entrance of a man.

She started up in affright.

It was Tiger Dick.

"Is your father here?" he asked, before she could speak.

She noticed that he did not appear to have lost his wonted cool nonchalance, though he spoke promptly.

"He has just this moment gone," she replied.

"I must follow him then. Excuse me. Good-night."

And he turned to go.

But she sprang forward to detain him.

"Oh, Mr. Langley! Is he guilty? Is Colonel Dangerfield—"

She ended with a shudder.

Dick guessed the rest.

"Nonsense!" he replied. "The coward they've got out there hasn't the pluck to harm a hare."

"But—"

"He is as innocent as I am."

"And Colonel Dangerfield is—"

"A very lively corpse indeed. I hope to see him dance at your wedding—and mine!"

There was a sly twinkle in Dick's eyes that implied that the two possessives referred to one

and the same wedding; but Polly was too excited to notice this pleasantry.

"Oh, you are not deceiving me?" she cried, extending her clasped hands imploringly.

"My dear," he replied, more gravely than was his wont, as he inclosed those cold and trembling hands in his, "when I deceive you call me no gentleman!"

His look and tone were direct and candid. They calmed her for the moment.

She did not detain him farther, as with a repeated "good-night" he withdrew from her presence.

When he was gone, she stood motionless in the middle of the floor, listening to the hubbub that came from the direction of the camp.

What were they doing? She remembered, when it was now too late, that she had let Tiger Dick, the only man in the camp who had the power to oppose the mob, go without assurance that he would try to save the wretch whose innocence he had declared.

Solitude and suspense once more quickened fear, and she began to pace the room, a prey to a thousand conflicting emotions.

Again and again she went to the door to gaze toward the camp, but to turn back with a shudder of sickening horror, and renew the struggle with remorse, until on one such occasion she heard a soft step behind her, and the door was pushed by another hand than hers.

In dismay she confronted a man who had glided in, and now stood with his back against the door, his face hidden by a black mask, and in his hand a menacing dagger, which enforced the mute command of silence conveyed by his finger resting on his mask over his lips.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE TRIAL.

CONTINUING to its destination, the mob filled the open space before the Bower, lighted by the bonfire.

Deserted by her patrons, Belle the Beautiful stood in the doorway of her saloon. The day's anxiety and the approach of the hour when she was to put into execution the desperate venture on which she had resolved, had left her pale and nervous.

All had noticed her altered appearance, and in their rough way the "boys" had expressed solicitude for her health.

At sight of the wretched prisoner, ghastly with despair, and his judge looking altogether too much like an implacable avenger, Belle became greatly excited.

"Here, Poky!" she cried, and on the appearance of a youth with weak eyes and stupid expression, put him in charge of the bar, and went out to mingle in the crowd, which was diversified by the presence of frightened women, who hovered on the outskirts of the throng.

Captain Jack was already seated on a nailkeg elevated on a packing box, while the trembling prisoner stood before him with his hands tied behind his back, and a stalwart guard at either elbow.

Lige Bigelow was now present, and supported his principal in the capacity of crier of the court.

"Order! Order!" he shouted, at the top of his stentorian lungs, at the same time beating the box with a stick.

This injunction was repeated, like echoes, in various parts of the crowd, until comparative quiet was secured.

Then Captain Jack rose to address them.

"Fellow-citizens," he began, "it won't pay to waste time reminding you that a prominent citizen of Fool's Luck has failed to put in an appearance for two days past under circumstances that point mighty strongly to foul play. You all know that there is a party in this camp that is directly interested in putting him out of the way. But it is also well known that one man swore to get square with the deceased for pretty rough handling, that everybody will agree was well deserved. Now, what we propose to do is to find out whether the prisoner byar is responsible for Iron Despard's death, and, if he is, to hang him higher'n Haman!"

This flourish was greeted with wild yells on all sides.

"Stand the galoot up whar we kin see bi'n!" demanded some one on the outskirts of the mob.

There were others "in the same fix," and the demand became so urgent that the shivering wretch had to be stood on a box before the trial (?) could proceed.

Then he was pelted with general execration from the Little Luckyites.

He looked about on the flushed faces and glaring eyes of this impartial jury, and all hope died out of his quailing heart. He was dumb.

But one who, without being a friend, was about to make an effort in his behalf, was forcing his way to the front. It was no less a person than Eben Harkness, Captain Jack's legal adviser, to urge a stay of proceedings in the interests of legal forms.

"Gentlemen! gentlemen!" he cried, as soon as he gained a position where he could command attention, "I protest against this irregular course, in conflict with all law. There are proper courts and officers before whom the ac-

cused can be arraigned, and where even-handed justice will be meted out in a legal manner. If he is guilty, he will as certainly hang as if you sought to punish his crime by perpetrating another yourselves. If he is innocent, all must be willing to give him every chance to prove the fact."

"Not much!" yelled a dissenting voice. "No shenanigan on this crowd! We're bound to hang him; and then you sharps kin quarrel over the corpse as long as you like. Eu, boys? Raise 'er! raise 'er!"

And they did "raise 'er" with a will.

Eben Harkness attempted to proceed, but his voice was drowned by derisive yells, cat-calls, groans, and thumping on boxes.

He lost his temper and tried to talk the crowd into respectful attention; but, though all could gather the spirit of his remarks by the determined expression of his face and his forcible gesticulations, yet even the sound of his voice could not be distinguished a rod from where he stood, so great was the hubbub.

This sort of contest could have but one termination with a crowd of that temper. For a while they were content to laugh; but presently was raised the cry:

"Down him! down him! Throw him out! Cheese the red tape!"

And seeing that they were becoming serious, he wisely desisted, washed his hands of the whole affair, and made his way out of the crowd.

The mob parted before him and closed again when he had passed, sending after him derisive yells of triumph.

In the midst of this demonstration, another, of vastly different caliber from Eben Harkness, Esq., mounted the box from which he had been detoured.

This time it was Tiger Dick.

He made no effort to quell the tumult, but stood perfectly still, looking at them and waiting patiently.

The magnetism of his eye hushed all that encountered its cold, unwavering glance.

An excited mob quiets down gradually. Most men begin to speak as soon as they can be heard by those near them. Not so Tiger Dick. He waited, not opening his lips until it was so still that he could be distinctly heard by even the most remote, without any strained effort of the voice.

The contrast of this unexpected silence was impressive. The men looked at one another, and wondered at the power of the man who could work such a marvel.

"Gentlemen," he said, "it is plain that the last proposition is not in keeping with the spirit of this free mountain country."

"Right you are, boss!" was the involuntary tribute of a Little Luckyite, who probably would not have assented to anything advanced by any other of the Pretty Polly party, however reasonable.

"Perhaps," continued Dick, with the cool audacity which makes a jest of what most men are prone to bide, "it is because the experience of most of my hearers in the matter of law has been much like my own. We none of us have any particular cause to be in love with it!"

And he made a grimace.

Such a yell of laughter as went up at his sally! By avowing affiliation with them in the larger fraternity of knaves, he almost made them forget their antagonism in the schism that divided Fool's Luck.

But Dick was not funny for the sake of fun. In raising the laugh he had secured a far more important point—he had made them ready to listen to him.

"But, boys," he pursued, even this familiar form of address being adopted advisedly, "in this matter we are all on the same side of the fence. However much we may be opposed to each other in a square business transaction, when it comes to treacherous assassination and robbery, we are equally interested in stamping it out.

"I am glad that this prisoner does not belong to either of the parties that divide our camp, with just as good men on one side as on the other. It makes it easier for us to give him a fair trial, without either party feeling that the other is trying to defend him from just punishment, because of party interest. Besides, if it is proved that he has killed Iron Despard out of revenge, or for the purpose of robbery, the murder will not stir up ill blood between us. My friend, here, Captain Jack"—and as he spoke he put his hand fraternally on Captain Jack's shoulder—"will know that I regret it as much as he does.

"All of you, gentlemen, know the relations I bore to Iron Despard while he was among us. I admired him for his manly courage. I was proud to have such an opponent in the struggle that was before us. I knew that I could meet him on the square, making every honest point that the game offered, but sure that there would be no shuffling under the table and no sleeve-games. I gave him my hand, just as if we had been in the ring. That was a pledge that there should be no striking below the belt."

This was a kind of argument that the men addressed could understand, as sundry nods and

murmurs of approval attested. They began to see the good feeling that had existed between the rival leaders in quite a new light. Pugilists fight without personal hostility; and here was an analogous case.

"So now," continued Dick, "I give my hand to your leader"—suiting the action to the word, so that Captain Jack, though rather against his inclination, could not well refuse the proffer—"as an earnest of hearty co-operation with him in the avenging one whom I claim as my friend as well as his, if it prove, as I hope it will not, that he has fallen a victim to the treacherous bullet of the assassin."

As the two opponents stood thus hand in hand a rousing cheer went up from the crowd. It was started by one of Dick's followers; but, knowing nothing of this, Captain Jack's men were swept along in the burst of enthusiasm.

Tiger Dick had the rare oratorical gift of knowing when to sit down. He knew that the masses are swayed by their feelings, and not by logical argument. He had got the Little Luckyites to thinking that he was a "rippin' good feller, a gentleman and a scholar, and a good judge of whisky;" and that was enough for his purpose.

Only one doubted him. It was Belle the Beautiful.

"He has talked them all over with that palaver tongue of his," she sighed. "He has covered his tracks so smoothly, that they have forgotten that Judge Pettigrew has more cause and more power than that miserable coward to put the man he feared out of the way. Well, let him hoodwink them; I'll be even with him yet!"

Her pale face took on a more determined set, and the glitter of her eyes hardened with resolve.

There was no further obstruction to the progress of the trial.

Captain Jack acted as judge by virtue of his office of referee of the camp; and it was taken for granted that the assembled sovereign citizens would act as a jury.

Several witnesses were called to testify to the encounter in which the prisoner had been thrown bodily through a window.

"I reckon," said Captain Jack, "that that will be no question as to this fact of which I was an eye-witness along with many now within the sound of my voice."

"Drive ahead, boss. That's straight as a string," shouted one of the jurors.

Meanwhile, Tiger Dick had been in hurried converse with Judge Pettigrew, the purport of which was known only to the speakers; but such exclusion need not extend to my readers.

"Judge," he had said, "we must establish the next point by your evidence."

"My evidence?" cried the judge.

"Certainly—if you are not prepared to have known your instrumentality in the disappearance."

"But what point?"—breathlessly.

"The menace of yonder wretch when you pointed out the man who had thrown him into the street."

"But I cannot contribute to the death of the fellow, knowing him to be innocent!"

"Nonsense! You don't say that he did it, or that you believe that he did it. You only testify to his threat. Come! there's no time to waste chopping logic over nice points of morality. I'll be responsible for the fellow's neck, if you'll only let me run the thing in my own way."

The Tiger was turning away; but Judge Pettigrew clutched his arm spasmodically, to detain him for a last word.

"The deuce!" he whispered, desperately, "I can't put myself in the light of an instigator of crime!"

Tiger Dick smiled indifferently.

"That's your lookout," he said. "Make the best showing you can for your own side; only testify to the truth in the case of the Teaser."

Aud di-engaging his arm, he left the judge to his not over-agreeable reflections.

He was seen to whisper to Captain Jack; and the next witness called was—

"Judge Pettigrew!"

CHAPTER XIX.

HOW IT ENDED.

THERE was a great craning of necks to see this witness. His participation against the accused was still further confirmation of what all were ready to accept—that the Pretty Polly crowd were really acting "on the square."

The judge felt savage, and, if he had been left to his own will, would have given his evidence "in short meter," standing on the ground. But the "boys" were "bound to have their full money's worth;" so the cry went up:

"Put 'im on the box, whar we kin see 'im."

"Toe the scratch, judge. No back-slidin'."

Judge Pettigrew flushed with vexation.

"For what I have to say—"

But his voice was drowned by a storm of protest.

"We're bound to see the witness!"

"Snake 'im out o' thar!"

"The box—the box!"

"Ef he's got the truth to tell, he won't be ashamed to let himself be seen!"

"He's no better than a laborin' man!"

"Toss 'im up!"

All was plentifully interlarded with oaths, which we spare the reader.

Tiger Dick smiled. He despised the average man quite as heartily as did Judge Pettigrew; but he drew the line on manhood—courage. As for distinctions based merely on money, they seemed to him childish, and he enjoyed seeing their votaries make wry faces over humble pie.

"I reckon we'll have to ask you up here, judge," he said. "Take my hand."

And swallowing his wrath, the mining magnate allowed himself to be drawn up into the view of all men. But his exasperation showed itself in his flushed face and flashing eyes, and was in nowise mitigated by the triumphant cheer with which the mob celebrated its victory. His voice, too, was testy, as he said:

"It seems to me that there is unnecessary importance attached to the little you are to get out of me. All I know is that while I was looking into the saloon to see what sort of man it was that Captain Digby had secured, this fellow put in an appearance covered with mud. He uttered no menace against the man who has since disappeared. He only mumbled over something about his having thrown him through a window, and said that he had him 'spotted.' Then he sneaked off, and that's the last I saw of him until he was dragged into the camp to-night. You are welcome to make the most of this testimony. If you will take my opinion, I don't believe he has pluck enough to attack Iron Despard even in the dark—any more than some of you."

So the judge brought in his stinger at the end. But the crowd took it good-naturedly, laughing at the animus that prompted it.

"Bully fur you, judge! That's as true as preachin'!"

"All down but nine! Set 'em up in the other alley!"

"The judge has woke up, fur rocks!"

So Farce sits hand in hand with Tragedy in Judge Lynch's court.

But while indulging their wit, the real business in hand was not lost sight of.

"Did'n't the galoot shoot at Iron Despard while he was chokin' the wind out o' Wat Tigh?" demanded an inquisitor.

At that question the flush of annoyance in Judge Pettigrew's face gave place to the palor of apprehension.

"How do I know?" he stammered; "I didn't see him when the shot was fired."

Then he hurriedly added:

"Gentlemen, this is all I know about the case, so you see that you are no wiser than before."

And he stepped down from the box, leaving them no chance to question him further.

Tiger Dick immediately covered his retreat.

"The next witness is Chet Brockwith, of Tenstrike—our bustling little neighbor."

Ringing yells from the Tenstrikers.

Chet Brockwith mounted the witness-stand, grinning and bowing his acknowledgments to his fellow-townsmen.

In a rollicking, off-hand way he told all that the reader already knows of his gambling bout with the Teaser, not coloring the facts enough to make any material difference.

Then Tiger Dick held up the pouch which had been found in Teddy's possession, saying:

"Gentlemen, it isn't worth while to waste time bringing forward witnesses to identify this pouch as Iron Despard's. Most of you have seen it; and its peculiarity of construction makes it easily recognizable. It only remains to give the accused an opportunity to account, if he can, for its having honestly come into his hands. Come my friend! It's your part; and if you want to save your neck, you'll have to speak loud and to the point."

Thus far Teddy had helplessly looked on while his life was being "sworn away." At the prospect of having a chance to speak for himself the dull despair lightened somewhat.

When he had been helped upon the box, he stood before his judges trembling and stammering with eagerness to impress them with his truthfulness.

"Gents," he cried, "I'm unbeknownst to you; so p'raps you'll set me down fur a liar."

"You bet!" was the prompt assurance from one of the crowd.

"But it's gospel truth I'm a-tellin' of ye, so help me God!" he continued, with quavering earnestness. "The gent what's piped out bove me through the winder, an' served me dog-goned right. I had no call to give none o' my lip to the lady, an' I axes her pardon fur the same. I was drunk, boys; an' ye know how it is yourselves."

"More power to yez!" shouted a sympathetic juror. "It's wishin' I am I had some o' them feelin's this blessed minute!"

"Waal," continued Teddy, "I axed the last witness; up, who bounced me; an' he pointed out the gent in a military cloak. Then I did say that I had spotted him—an' that's the God's

truth. I don't deny it. But, gents, sayin' ain't doin', by a long shot. Drunk as I was, I knowed I hadn't no call fur to buck ag'in' a-walkin' airthquake. I'd only git broke in two—I knowed that. So I cleared out. I did, gents—I swear I did! I didn't shoot at him. I didn't know nothing about it, until I heard it next day at Tenstrike. 'Pon my soul I didn't! Then when I was cleaned out—you'll think I'm lyin' to ye maybe, but I'm a-givin' it to ye straight as a string—when I was dead-broke, I was goin' fur another job o' bull-whackin', an' I found this pouch right in the road."

A groan of incredulity rose from the mob, and a voice cried:

"You ain't the first beat that has took to the road to find money!"

It had occurred to Teddy that, if he told the spot where he had actually found the pouch, it would be an awkward task to account for his having been off the road among the rocks, in so excellent a place for an ambush; so he simplified matters by weaving a strand of fiction through his woof of fact.

Upon learning that the pouch was in the Teaser's possession, Tiger Dick at once saw that it must have dropped from Iron Despard's pocket while he was being carried unconscious to his place of detention. Where it had dropped along the route they had taken he did not know. There was a chance that Teddy's testimony might lead directly into the neighborhood of the hiding-place. But it was by taking desperate risks that Tiger Dick often made great hits; and the moment he heard Teddy say that he had found the pouch in the road, he knew that he lied, guessed why he had lied, and was assured that, through the effort of the Teaser to save himself, the secret was safe—indeed, his testimony would be misleading.

So the Tiger affected great interest, and questioned Teddy narrowly. The prisoner told the story so straight, and stuck to it so consistently, that the attention of the crowd was fixed; and as Dick seemed to be impressed by its possible truth, others began to waver.

"Gentlemen," said the Tiger in conclusion, "in my opinion this is at least worthy of being investigated. I tell you frankly that I am loth to believe that this cowardly fellow—see how he shakes!—would dare to attack such a man as Iron Despard, even at the back. Of course, there is a possibility of his shooting him from behind; but, if he had done so, it seems strange that he should keep the evidence of his crime about him, and recklessly display it so near the scene of the murder as Tenstrike. Why not throw the worthless pouch away and keep the gold, which no one could identify? Besides, if a murder has been committed, he could not carry the body far, and we may be able to trace it. It seems to me, then, that it would be well to stay the execution until we have had time to look further into the case. Before hanging the prisoner out of hand, it is perhaps worth remembering that so far we really have no definite evidence that the missing man really is dead. If there are others of my mind, I propose that the accused be held in confinement, and that tomorrow a search party be formed to go in quest of the body."

"Snide! snide!" shouted a man who did not care to let himself be seen.

One, more bold, gesticulated excitedly from his elevation on a stump, while he cried:

"Hold on, gents! How do we know that this ain't a trick of the Pretty Polly gang to run their man off in the night?"

The crowd waited in suspicious silence for an answer to this challenge, all eyes centering upon Tiger Dick.

He looked at them calmly, and replied with his wonted imperturbable smile:

"Gentlemen, you forget that this proposal came from Tiger Dick. If this were my man, you never should have brought him to trial while I had a shot in my revolver or breath in my body. But to assure the cautious ones among you, I pledge myself as surely for this man when he is wanted. If he is not forthcoming I will stand in his place. He shall be placed for to-night under a guard picked from both parties, and that will give you ample evidence of any treachery attempted. Is there any one in the crowd who hesitates to accept the pledge of Tiger Dick?"

There was none such, and the meeting immediately proceeded to select guards.

But Belle the Beautiful! She was already engaged in carrying out her project. Let us see what it was.

CHAPTER XX.

WOMAN AGAINST WOMAN.

BELLE THE BEAUTIFUL did not wait to hear the end of the trial. As soon as she saw the part Tiger Dick had taken it upon himself to play, her suspicions were quickened.

"When he is most plausible he is most deadly!" she murmured to herself. "Why won't they see that he is deceiving them!"

And weighing every word that fell from his lips, she was strongly impressed by what escaped the others—the "if" which the Tiger inter-

posed between the prisoner and the assumption of his guilt.

"He is only playing with them to gain time," she murmured. "He knows that this man is innocent, and will save him when it is no longer necessary to divert them from the real scent. But, if I am to circumvent him, now is my time, while all are engaged."

She went into her saloon, where Poky reigned in solitary state, waiting the rush when the waning of the excitement left the lynchers free to discover that they had yelled their throats dry.

"Poky," she said, "you will have to run things alone to-night. Remember, I'm not to be called, no matter what happens."

"Don'tee worret, Miss Belle," replied Poky. "I'll make 'em mind their eye. Lord! but ye do look sick, mum. Jest ye go to bed an' sleep till mornin'."

She went, wearily enough to all seeming, and when, after the trial, the boys "rushed" the place, one and all asking after her, Poky jerked his thumb upward, indicating the story above, and replied:

"Turned in on the sick-list, boss."

They remembered how ill she had appeared for the past few days, and with looks of genuine anxiety they enjoined silence upon one another, that she might not be disturbed by unnecessary noise.

But the moment the door closed between her and observation, all Belle's lassitude had disappeared as if by magic. Her preparations were made with strained, intense eagerness; then she had glided out through the back way.

Her heart wrung by a thousand conflicting emotions, she had reconnoitered about Judge Pettigrew's house until satisfied that no one was near. Then she had crept to a window, where, through a slightly disarranged curtain, she could look in, as Tiger Dick had done two nights previous.

Polly sat with her elbows on the table and her head between her hands, gazing straight before her, evidently plunged into troubled thought. She was very pale.

The sight of her thrilled Belle.

"Is it remorse—or guilty fear?" she asked herself. "What hand had she in his disappearance? No one has seen him since I met him in her company. Oh, can she be so wicked?"

Polly suddenly dropped her arms on the table and buried her face in them. Then she was shaken by a storm of emotion.

A moment later she sprung up and began to pace the floor, striking her hands together distractedly.

"Oh!" cried the watcher, "that is guilt!"

Her first impulse was to try to gain admittance to the house at once. But she reflected that if she knocked in the usual way, Polly would demand who was there, and it was not her purpose to betray herself by letting her voice be heard.

So she crouched down and waited, trusting to the girl's restlessness to bring her to the door.

The minutes passed like hours. But at last her patience was rewarded.

The door opened and Polly stood in it, looking toward the gleaming lights of the camp.

"Oh, what have I done!—what have I done!" she moaned, wringing her hands.

Those words went to Belle's heart like a knife. They were confirmation of her fears.

It occurred to her to remain concealed, on the chance of some unguarded word being dropped.

"Why—why did I consent?" continued Polly. "I shall never know a moment's peace, haunted by this horror!"

She shuddered and sighed.

Then, with a movement of despair, she turned and closed the door behind her.

It went to, and the bolt was slipped without her agency.

At the same instant she discovered that some one had glided in behind her.

She heard a warning sound:

"Sh—sh—sh!"

The lamp-light flashed from the polished blade of a bowie.

With a smothered shriek she sprang away, and then, wide-eyed and shivering with fear, confronted a man (seemingly) whose face was hidden behind a black mask.

"Who are you? What do you want here?" she gasped.

The intruder made no verbal reply, but put an index finger before the mouth of his mask, evidently to enjoin silence.

Then he stood still, regarding the trembling Polly intently, his eyes gleaming through the eye-holes.

Polly observed that he was slight in stature, and that his hands, gauntleted in buck-skin, were unusually small. His build gave no great promise of strength; for he lacked breadth of shoulder. He appeared like a youth who had not yet filled out to the form of mature manhood.

These facts lessened Polly's fear of him somewhat; for she had been surrounded by rough men so much that she had not the timidity of a woman who had associated only with gentlemen.

So she made a very creditable stand, demanding pluckily:

"How dare you enter this house as you have? My father will presently return—I am expecting him every minute—and visit this outrage with merited chastisement."

The intruder started at mention of her father, and sternly pointed to Polly's rocking-chair, which stood in the center of the room, near the table.

Resistance was useless. Polly sat down.

The silent intruder made a waving motion with his hand, indicating his wish that she rock. His purpose was plain. The noise of the rocking on the bare floor would make it impossible for her to leave the chair while the intruder's back was turned, without his knowledge.

Belle the Beautiful had a wild notion that Iron Despard was being detained somewhere in Judge Pettigrew's house, bound and gagged, perhaps, if not dead. She had come for the purpose of examining the premises, and liberating him, if he was a prisoner. She shrank from the thought that they had actually killed him, after using Polly as a decoy to get him into their power.

Taking up the lamp, she threw open the door to the judge's bed-chamber, where the man she sought had really lain for several hours.

It was now empty.

To disguise her purpose, she rummaged about, as if looking for money.

The only other room on the ground floor was the kitchen. She entered it. It was unoccupied, and the fire was out.

All this while Polly, rocking with less pleasure than ever before in her life, was watching Belle's every movement.

As she watched, the expression of her face changed. Her fear abated. The color returned to her cheeks and lips, the latter being compressed with an expression of determination. Her eyes flashed with haughty anger.

She stopped rocking and sat with her hands folded in her lap, as much at ease as if she were entertaining company.

Polly's own chamber, above the room in which they sat, remained to be examined. Belle turned to indicate her wish that Polly precede her up-stairs.

She at once detected the change.

Polly smiled derisively as she saw the other stop and look at her.

"Pardon me, madam," she said, "but I would suggest that we end this farce, and come to a sensible explanation of your purpose in coming here in so unusual a manner."

Belle set the lamp on the table, and stood as if waiting for what was to be said further.

With a curling lip Polly went on:

"In your intimate association with men you should have learned that the masculine dress seldom sits gracefully on a woman; and your walk is what one would expect from your figure."

Still the mask stood silent. Was she at a loss how to proceed?

At these apparent signs of indecision Polly's assurance increased.

"Pray be seated," she said, motioning carelessly toward a chair. "I do not ask you to take off your things, because, not to stand on ceremony, you are not welcome; but I may request you to remove your mask, since it must be as uncomfortable as it is useless."

Now for the first time Belle the Beautiful spoke, and her voice was a surprise to the listener. It was marked by a high bred hauteur, while her accent had a cultivated polish which could not be simulated by one who had not mingled in elegant society.

"Pardon me," she said. "If I decline to sit in your presence while you are seated, it is from a motive quite the reverse of servility. As for removing my mask, it were perhaps more considerate of you to let it remain."

Her air of superiority, more than her words, nettled Polly.

"It would be more polite," she replied, pointedly, "to expose your face."

"As you will," responded Belle, and removed the mask, laying it on the table.

The result was a severe shock to Polly. The face thus revealed was ghastly pale, and drawn with lines of suffering. The eyes burned with an unnatural glitter.

Polly half-started from the chair, with a gasp. Then, in a rage with herself for this involuntary token of dismay, she sank back again, endeavoring in vain to regain her air of self-assured contempt.

Belle smiled sardonically.

"Your acuteness in penetrating my disguise, and your obtuseness in refusing to recognize a social peer, if not a superior, may prove equally unhappy," said she.

Though she could not command her agitation, that speech goaded Polly to anger.

"May I ask, madam," she said, "to what I owe this intrusion?"

"I am come," replied Belle, steadily, "to demand what has been done with Colonel Despard Dangerfield since you decoyed him to this house!"

Polly blanched in spite of herself beneath the penetrating scrutiny of those accusing eyes; and the tone was so positive that she did not think of questioning that Iron Despard had been seen

—perhaps by the speaker!—to enter the house with her.

In her fright she "ran to cover"—weakly took refuge in prevarication.

"You seem greatly interested in Colonel Dangerfield," she said, trying to infuse into the words all a woman's spiteful venom.

Belle brought her hand down on the table with impatient emphasis. Her eyes flashed fire.

"That is not to the purpose," she cried. "What has been done with him?"

Fear, combined with rage, made Polly hysterical, and hysteria made her reckless.

"Perhaps you have a lover's right to ask!" she sneered, and laughed in shrill derision.

For one moment it looked as if Belle was about to spring at the throat of her tormentor.

So terrible was the white fury of her face that Polly half-started up from her chair, with a suppressed cry of dismay.

"Sit down!" commanded the other, pointing to the chair.

And suddenly bereft of strength by the intensity of the spirit she had aroused, Polly sunk helplessly back.

Then Belle, by an almost superhuman effort, got herself in hand again.

"You little fool!" she cried. "Cannot you comprehend that a woman who is desperate enough to come on such an errand as this will not stop short of the accomplishment of her purpose, even to the taking of your paltry life, if necessary?"

"You dare not harm me!" replied Polly, her voice quavering with apprehension nevertheless. "I command you to leave the house at once or I will call for help."

At that, rage swept away the last remnant of Belle's patience.

She sprung upon Polly with the fury of a wild-cat, tearing open the front of her dress, planting one knee into her lap so as to pin her in her chair, clapping a hand over her mouth to intercept her agonized shriek of terror, and holding her bowie so that its point indented the shrinking flesh of the fair, white bosom her savage clutch had exposed to view.

CHAPTER XXI. A "TICKLISH" SITUATION.

FOR A MOMENT BELLE THE BEAUTIFUL PANTED SO THAT SHE COULD NOT SPEAK, WHILE POLLY WAS AS HELPLESS AS A FAWN WITH THE FANGS OF A WOLF IN ITS THROAT.

PRESENTLY SHE GAINED SELF-CONTROL SUFFICIENT TO SAY IN BUSKY TONES:

"UNDERSTAND, ONCE FOR ALL, THAT YOUR LIFE IS AS DUST IN THE BALANCE AGAINST MY PURPOSE. AS FOR THE CONSEQUENCE TO MYSELF, YOU SHOULD SEE THAT I AM BEYOND CARING FOR THAT. NOW, HEAR ME:—IF WE ARE DISCOVERED, THROUGH YOUR FAULT, OR BY ACCIDENT—it makes no difference which—I SHALL KILL YOU. YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR WHAT-EVER HAS HAPPENED TO THE MAN WHOM I AM NOT ASHAMED TO SAY I LOVE. IF I AM FRUSTRATED IN THE EFFORTS TO WRING FROM YOU THE SECRET OF HIS WHEREABOUTS, AS I SAID BEFORE, I SHALL KILL YOU."

She took her hand from Polly's mouth and lifted her knee from her lap, withdrawing reluctantly, as a beast of prey slowly relaxes its fangs, on the alert to see if its victim shows the least sign of quivering life.

Polly Pettigrew was completely cowed.

"MERCY! MERCY!" she gasped as soon as her lips were freed.

Then she slipped from the chair to her knees and repeated her appeal:

"MERCY! MERCY! SPARE MY LIFE AND I WILL TELL YOU EVERYTHING!"

"FIRST," said Belle, "WHO PUT YOU UP TO THIS?"

"IT WAS MR. LANGLEY'S PLAN."

"I KNEW IT!—I KNEW IT! OH, THE SUBTLE VILAIN!" cried Belle.

Then her tone turned to withering contempt.

"AND YOUR FATHER—YOUR FATHER CONSENTED TO MAKE HIS OWN DAUGHTER A PARTY TO HIS CRIME!"

"OH! BUT THEY DECLARED THAT NO HARM SHOULD COME TO HIM. BELIEVE ME, I WOULD NOT HAVE AIDED—"

"BAH! THEY LIED! YOU KNEW THAT THEY LIED!"

AND IN HER CONCENTRATED FURY IT SEEMED AS IF SHE MEDITATED A SECOND MURDEROUS ATTACK.

"OH, LISTEN TO ME!" cried Polly.

"NOT SO LOUD!" warned Belle in a hoarse whisper. "REMEMBER, YOUR LIFE HANGS UPON THE CHANCE OF OUR NOT BEING INTERRUPTED."

"LISTEN—BEAR ME!" sobbed the terrified girl, still on her knees. "THEY TOLD ME THAT HE WOULD ONLY BE DETAINED UNTIL PAPA HAD ESTABLISHED HIS CLAIM—that he should only be held a PRISONER, WITHOUT INJURY."

"AND YOU CONSENTED TO EXERCISE YOUR FASCINATION TO THAT END!" hissed Belle, jealous fury gleaming in her eyes, as it found expression in her choice of words. "TELL ME! HOW DID YOU PERSUADE HIM TO FOLLOW YOU HERE?"

Disjointedly Polly told the story of the sham runaway and equally fraudulent sprained ankle. Even in her terror her woman's instinct told her the jealousy that prompted close inquiry into this detail which, aside from feeling, had no direct bearing on Belle's avowed purpose—the rescue of Iron Despard, so she was careful to paint his indifference in true colors.

Belle listened suspiciously.

"AND YOU MEAN TO TELL ME," she broke in at last, "THAT NEITHER BY WORD NOR MANNER DID HE SHOW YOU ANY TEN—"

She choked at the word "tenderness," and substituted "no sympathy," going on, hurriedly:

"THEN WHY, FEELING SUCH INDIFFERENCE, SHOULD HE FOLLOW YOU INTO THE HOUSE?—ACCEPT THE HOSPITALITY OF HIS ENEMY'S DAUGHTER, FOR WHOM HE CARED NOTHING?"

Polly admitted that her urgency had left him no alternative, in politeness.

"WELL, GO ON! GO ON!" cried Belle, turning from that part of the subject with sudden impatience.

Polly then tremulously proceeded to the administering of the drug, to be interrupted by a whirlwind of fury.

"AND YOU PUT THE POISON INTO HIS CUP, YOU MURDERESS! YOUR HAND HELD THE FATAL DRAUGHT TO HIS LIPS! ENOUGH! ENOUGH! I WILL HAVE YOUR HEART'S BLOOD FOR EVERY DROP!"

But the words choked in the foam that stood on her lips. Once more she sprung upon the quailing object of her rage, clutching her by the throat with her left hand, while the murderous knife gleaned above her head in the grip of her right. And beneath, the round-d white bosom lay bare, to receive the fatal plunge!

The woman was plainly goaded to the verge of insanity.

The girl, not struggling, gazed upon the knife as if fascinated, until her eyelids dropped and she collapsed in a swoon.

With an inarticulate sound which was like the growl of an animal, Belle dashed her helpless victim to the floor.

That such a weakling should frustrate her mighty love exasperated her; and her scorn mastered her resentment.

For a time she paced the room with the restless iteration of a caged lioness. Then the fact that she had not yet learned the final disposition of the man she sought occurred to her.

With the usual appliance of water and chafing she roused Polly to consciousness, and then commanded her to rise.

The girl got up from the floor and sat trembling on the edge of her chair.

As soon as she could speak, she explained that what she had given Despard was a simple narcotic. She then tried to urge her misgivings and regrets; but Belle cut her short.

"WHAT WAS DONE WITH HIM? WHERE IS HE?"

"I DON'T KNOW. PAPA AND MR. LANGLEY TOOK HIM AWAY AT MIDNIGHT, ASSISTED BY BILL ROGERS. I PRESUME THAT ROGERS MUST HAVE BEEN LEFT IN CHARGE OF HIM. I HAVE NOT SEEN HIM SINCE."

"AND YOU HAVE NO IDEA WHERE HE WAS TAKEN TO?"

"NONE WHATEVER."

"WHEN DID YOUR FATHER RETURN?"

"I DID NOT SEE HIM UNTIL THE NEXT DAY. I WAS AWAKE ALL NIGHT, AND AM SURE HE DID NOT RETURN TO THE HOUSE."

Belle the Beautiful began to pace the room, her brows deeply corrugated.

Tears flowed down Polly's cheeks; and in a plaintive voice she began to tell the remorse she had suffered during those two days of suspense.

Belle stopped her with an impatient stamp of the foot and an angry:

"HUSH! DON'T YOU SEE I'M TRYING TO THINK? WHAT ARE YOUR PULING REGRETS TO ME?"

Polly sat mute. She had not spunk enough left to resent anything.

At last Belle came to a decision.

"FETCH PEN AND PAPER," she commanded.

Polly obeyed with the docility of a child.

"NOW WRITE WHAT I DICTATE."

Polly placed herself in readiness.

"HOW DO YOU USUALLY ADDRESS YOUR FATHER IN A NOTE?" asked Belle.

"DARLING PAPA," was the reply.

"WELL, WRITE 'DARLING PAPA.'"

Polly essayed to do as she was bid; but her hand trembled so that the pen caught in the paper and spattered the ink, and the words were a wretched scrawl.

Belle snatched up the sheet, lighted it in the lamp, and tossed it into the fireplace.

"THIS WON'T DO," she said. "HAVE YOU ANY LIQUOR IN THE HOUSE?"

Polly brought a flask and glass from the pantry.

Belle poured out "a man's dose," and commanded tersely:

"DRINK IT!"

Polly was too spirit-broken to protest. She swallowed the liquor, though it caused her to cough until her eyes overflowed with tears of strangustration.

The spirits steadied her nerves, and she made a second more successful attempt, Belle dictating in a hard, unsympathetic way:

"DARLING PAPA:—I WRITE YOU UNDER PERIL OF MY LIFE. IF COLONEL DANGERFIELD IS NOT RETURNED TO HIS FRIENDS, ALIVE AND WELL, I SHALL BE KILLED, AND MY BODY BE LEFT ON YOUR DOORSTEP."

"YOUR AGONIZED DAUGHTER,
‘POLLY.’"

The pen dropped from Polly's hand.

"OH! YOU ARE NOT GOING TO FORCE ME AWAY FROM HOME!"

"AM I NOT?" cried Belle.

Then she laughed, a hard, metallic laugh.

"I intend to take a leaf out of your book, my dear," she said, grimly. "Thanks for the suggestion of a way which will make your detention as a hostage for the safety of the victim of your treachery quite an easy matter."

"What do you mean?" asked Polly, shaken with new trepidation.

"Get your hat and shawl."

"Oh, you cannot—"

"Obey me!"

And sobbing like a frightened child, Polly did her best.

"Will you let me add something to the note?" she asked.

"That depends upon what it is. No clew to where you are going, or with whom."

"No. I only want to urge him to save me."

"Very well. You may add that."

Polly took the pen again in hand, and appended:

"Oh, papa—dear, dear papa! save me! If you love your wretched child—"

"That will do!" said Belle, who was looking over her shoulder.

At the inexorable command, Polly stopped. But tears had fallen on the paper, and the postscript was so much more tremulous than what had gone before, that it spoke for itself.

"Now, listen," said Belle; "for this is the last opportunity I shall have to speak to you. From this time forward your life rests entirely in your own hands. You will have opportunity to call for help whenever you choose to open your mouth; or by actual or pretended awkwardness you can expose yourself and me. But understand this clearly: whether by your own fault, or by accident, the moment I see that my purpose is to be balked, that moment I will take your life and face the consequences! An involuntary cry, a mere stumble at an unlucky crisis may cost you your life. Do you understand?"

"Yes! yes!" whispered Polly's bloodless and quivering lips.

But Belle went on:

"With you, I can get Colonel Dangersfield, if he is alive. If they have killed him—"

She stopped, pressing her hand over her heart, and her face grew ashen gray, as with a sudden spasm. Then she recovered and went on steadily:

"If they have killed him, you who lured him to his death shall pay the penalty! If I find myself in danger of losing you before I have learned whether he is alive or dead, I will secure my revenge at all hazards. Then if it turns out that he is alive, you will have been punished for your treachery."

"Oh, you cannot commit murder—"

"Bah! Would I not kill a dog that had bitten one I loved? But we are wasting time; and any moment may bring the discovery which will precipitate your death. One word further. Whatever I bid, you are to do without hesitation or murmur. Do you hear?"

"Yes! yes!"

"Come, then!"

Belle seized the shrinking girl by the wrist and turned out the light.

With the fear of instant death ever present, Polly was careful not to offer any hindrance to her movements.

So they passed out into the night.

But they had gone scarcely ten rods when Belle suddenly stopped and shrank back so abruptly that Polly ran against her.

"Hallo, judge!—is that you?" said a voice; and the outlines of a man's figure were dimly discernible directly in their path.

With a moan Polly sank to the earth.

CHAPTER XXII.

A PRISON WITHOUT BOLTS OR BARS.

For one sickening moment the heart of Belle the Beautiful stood still. Then the thickened articulations of the man told her that he was under the influence of liquor.

Her resolution was instantaneous.

A rush—a blow—and the luckless intruder sunk to the ground, stunned by a blow from Belle's pistol butt.

Again she clutched Polly's wrist.

"Come! Not a moment is to be lost!"

As in a dream Polly realized what had happened; and, dazed at the boldness of her captor, she hurried in her wake.

Standing as near the face of a perpendicular cliff as the crags at its base left the ground available for building purposes, the Bower could be approached from the rear with little danger of detection by any one in the street.

By this way Belle dragged her prisoner without further adventure.

To Polly, being led to unknown peril, it was inexpressible agony to pass within a few feet of men who would have sprung to her rescue, and yet not dare to apprise them of her extreme need by so much as a sound. But when the cry rose in her throat, she imagined that she felt again the keen point of Belle's knife pricking her bosom.

When they gained the interior of the house, she moved as cautiously as did Belle, that the

men who were making merry with only a thin partition between her and them might not detect the presence of more than one person in Belle's apartments.

Through the dark kitchen, she was led upstairs, to Belle's own sleeping room.

There a light was struck; and she saw again the implacable resolve in her captor's face.

Signing her to a chair, into which she sunk exhausted, Belle went to a closet, and selected from several vials which stood on one of its shelves a small bottle containing a dark-brown fluid.

She did not take the trouble to hide the label from Polly. Across the top was printed in bold letters:—

"POISON."

Below this was written the word:—

"Laudanum."

From a long-necked bottle she poured out a glass of wine. Into this she poured the opiate with a steady hand, counting the drops as they fell.

Polly looked on with distended eyes, as if fascinated.

Belle placed the drugged wine before her with the whispered command:

"Drink!"

Wild-eyed, Polly gazed at the wine. She could not move. Her tongue clove to the roof of her mouth.

She felt a hand clutch her hair. She caught the gleam of a polished steel blade. She heard a boarse voice whisper in her ear, so close that the hot breath seemed to burn her cheek:—

"Fool! It will not harm you! Can I guard you every moment? You will lie unconscious while I am negotiating an exchange of prisoners with your father. Have I not proved apt in learning from your example?"

Her head was drawn back so that her face was turned up to the ferocious countenance that bent above her, like one of the Furies.

She strove to whisper a last plea for mercy; but the glass was lifted to her lips, and feeling that that terrible face would be the last thing she saw in life, she swallowed the draught.

Then with a shudder she closed her eyes.

She wondered vaguely that unconsciousness did not come at once. She heard the babble of voices and the shuffling of feet down-stairs. She knew that her captor had left her, and was moving about the room.

She thought of her father—of his dismay when he found her gone and read her note. Would he—ould be produce Iron Despard alive, and so save her?

If he could not! If she died! Would she be mutilated with that terrible knife? Or would her captor temper her revenge with mercy, and let her pass into the next life through this unconsciousness?

And she so young!—just at the threshold of life!

How long she remained thus she could not have told; but she was roused by a clutch on her shoulder.

Opening her eyes with a start, she saw that Belle had prepared the bed for her occupancy.

"Undress," was the terse command.

Resistance was worse than useless. She obeyed.

As she got into bed she was thrilled with the thought—would she be left there to die alone? Left! Would Belle leave her?

Suppose she should feign stupor, and Belle should go away before the drug had really locked her senses in oblivion? She might leap out of the window, and by her screams surround herself with men who would protect her from Belle's murderous knife!

She closed her eyes and lay perfectly still.

Presently she opened them languidly. Belle sat at a little distance, apparently immersed in deep thought, not heeding her.

Despairing, she closed them again.

She never knew when the noises down-stairs died away into silence.

Her stertorous breathing told Belle when the drug had had its effect. She rose, went to the bedside, and lifted the eyelids one after the other. The irises were turned upward, almost out of sight.

"Now," muttered Belle the Beautiful, "Despard or her life!"

While she stood there a commotion arose down-stairs.

Swiftly she removed her disguise, and throwing a dress over her head hurried to the scene of conflict, fastening it as she went.

As she entered the saloon, she saw a man standing with his back in the corner, and a brace of cocked revolvers in his hands, menaced by three others, while the crowd surged back and forth, some only anxious to get out of the way of a chance bullet, and some appealing to the combatants to wait until they got out of doors, and not "sling lead around loose" in such a crowd.

Fearlessly Belle sprang forward, crying:

"Look a-hyer, gents! I'd have you know that the Bower ain't a low dive for drunken brawls. Can't I turn my back for a minute but I must get up out of a sick bed to keep you dogs from wrang'ing?"

The men turned. Her extreme pallor, and

the necessity to hold her dress together at the throat, seemed to corroborate her words. In an instant every man who was not a party to the quarrel was transformed into a self-appointed policeman to preserve the peace; and the brawlers were hustled out of doors.

Those remaining were lavish in their promises that there would be no more trouble. They expressed their regrets at her illness, and urged her to return and take care of herself, assuring her that the place should be as quiet as a Quaker meeting, so as not to disturb her rest.

She saw the wisdom of retiring. This lucky episode would make it impossible that suspicion should be directed toward her when Polly was missed.

But she longed to know how the trial of Teddy the Teaser had concluded—whether the action of Tiger Dick had fulfilled her expectations.

Fortune favored her by sending Lige Bigelow to the Bower at that moment for an "eye-opener," preparatory to his night-vigil as captain of the guard over Teddy.

He took off his slouch hat with a grand flourish as he greeted Belle, and continued to hold it at his side while he talked to her.

"Lord bless yer purty pictur', Miss Belle," he said. "It knocks me clean down into my boots to see ye 'o played-out lookin'. I allow, now, ye wouldn't play it so low down on the boys as to git sick?"

"Don't worry about me, Lige," she replied, with a wan smile; for she liked his rough honesty. "I've a headache; but I'll be myself again after a night's sleep. I wanted to hear the rest of the trial. How did it turn out?"

"Waah," said Lige, with a foreboding shake of the head and a profound sigh, "things is git-tin' purty bad. Foo's Luck is a-loosin' of her grip, so to speak. They're a-goin' fur to keep the galoot over night. Who ever heared o' such doin's?"

And he snorted with disgust.

"Who proposed such a thing?" asked Belle.

"This hyar Tiger Dick."

"Ah!"

It was, then, as she had anticipated.

"But why?" she asked eagerly. "If the man is guilty—"

"That's just it," interrupted Lige—"if!"

"Well, isn't he?"

"Ask the new boss of this hyar camp! Captain Jack! Haw! haw! haw! Axin' yer pardon, Miss Belle, it's enough to make a boss laugh!"

"What do you mean, Lige?"

"I mean that Captain Jack has stepped down an' out. He's no more Referee of Fool's Luck than you be. Blast my gizzard ef I couldn't chaw wrought nails!"

"But what has happened?"

"Happened? Why, this hyar Tiger Dick says:

"Gents, thar's a nigger in the wood-pile, somewhars; an' I move that we hunt him up before we stretch this purty feller's neck."

"An' the boys, every last son of a sea-cook, says:

"Pitch the trump, pardner; it's by me."

"He had Iron Despard's pouch—the Teaser did—an' was jist slingin' the dust around down thar at Tenstrike as ef he owned a mill that was grindin' it out by the cord. But he says he fou-round it!" mimicking a whine.

"So the boss says mebby Iron Despard ain't passed in his checks yit, an' we're to hunt him in the mornin'. Captain Jack knuckles under like a two year old; an' we've got the Tesser under guard at Frenchy's dug-out. But I'm captain o' the guard, an' don't ye surgit it; an' ef that's any shenanigan in this hyar leetle game thar'll be a big funeral ter-morrer, with more stuff than mourners!"

So it had all turned out as she had foreseen. But the pouch troubled her. Had Dick quieted Polly with false promises? Was it blood money that the Teaser had been squandering in debauch at Tenstrike; or, was it all a blind—one of the Tiger's subtle plots? Lastly, was it possible that the pouch had been dropped and found by the Teaser, as he alleged?

Either of the last two solutions held out hope, so she clung to them, and, with a wordless prayer in her heart, waited.

But when she again stood beside unconscious Polly, a surge of pain and passion swelled in her breast, and she felt as if she could strangle the girl who had used her charms to lure the man she loved into so dark a snare.

Meanwhile Judge Pettigrew, going home in anything but a good humor, had stumbled over the man whom Belle the Beautiful had knocked senseless with the butt of her revolver.

A shudder of horror thrilled through him, leaving that chill of the scalp which gave the sensation of the hair standing on end.

"A dead man!" he gasped; and instantly the darkness seemed peopled with skulking phantoms.

He hurried forward to the house. All was dark within as without. He supposed that Polly had gone to bed in a "pet," for he knew by experience that her temper sometimes took that phase.

He passed through the sitting room into the kitchen, groping for a lantern. With this he

returned and found the man stunned, but not otherwise injured.

A little whisky poured down his throat and some vigorous slapping brought him to; but his wits were plainly wool gathering.

He mumbled a few incoherent words, and his manner and his breath showed that he had been "irrigating" too freely.

With his irritation in no wise allayed by this discovery, Judge Pettigrew took the shortest way to get rid of the fellow—got him on his feet, turned his face toward the camp, and ordered him to move on.

The inebriate showed a disposition to shake hands, but being peremptorily repulsed, finally shambled and stumbled off, mumbling in a conciliatory tone:

"Tha's all right, judge—that's all right."

Judge Pettigrew returned to the house and, having the lantern to go to bed by, did not notice the note his daughter had left on the table beside the lamp.

His sleep was broken and oppressed by grisly nightmare. Now he saw Iron Despard lying on the rocks with a gory gash in his throat, while Tiger Dick, perched cross-legged on a boulder, and smiling with his Mephistophelean sneer, pointed to a blood reeking bowie in the judge's hand. Again Iron Despard towered over him, demanding satisfaction for the trick he had played him, while Tiger Dick stood by with a look of innocence that Ah Sin might have envied.

So the night passed; and the morning brought him the knowledge of his daughter's disappearance, and the portentous note her trembling hand had penned.

His blood ran cold; his heart felt as if it were in the remorseless grip of a hand of iron. Let us do him credit according to his deserts. In that moment he thought not of himself, nor of his interests, but only of his child; for, villain as he was, he loved her.

She must be released at any cost. Iron Despard must be given up at once. With this purpose he rushed forth to find Tiger Dick.

But during the night events had taken place of which he knew nothing, but of which we will forthwith apprise the reader.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE RESCUE.

ALTHOUGH to outward seeming, Wat Tigh had occupied a "back seat" ever since the advent of Tiger Dick, yet he had not been idle. Other things being equal, the men would naturally have ranged themselves under the leadership of the Tiger; but Wat bid for their allegiance with something more substantial than sentiment—with the promise of gold.

He had sapped both parties of their most desperate members, and bound them in a secret league, sworn to do his bidding. They had secret signals, by means of which, passed from one to another under the very noses of the uninitiated, a midnight meeting could be called at a moment's notice.

When Tiger Dick assured Judge Lynch's court of his good faith in asking a stay of proceedings in the trial of Teddy the Teaser, Wat Tigh, ever on the alert for some opportunity to undermine him in the confidence of the community, conceived what he thought a brilliant idea.

On the instant he started the call for a secret meeting, and it passed through the crowd by the preconcerted system of telegraphy. After the trial, the members skulked away in the darkness, to reassemble at their rendezvous.

"Gents," said Wat, "it'll stand us in hand to set the two armies at loggerheads ef we kin. The time's a-comin' when all that ain't with us will be ag'in' us; an' that time ain't fur off. When it does come, ef the enemy is afraid to trust each other, it'll be a dog-gone'sght easier to whip 'em separate, than to hev them go in cahoots an' reach fur us as one man. Now, we don't keer no more fur one than fur t'other; an' this bl'rsted coyote they're wranglin' over roight hang an' be blowed; but ef we kin use him to set 'em by the ears, then he's our man; an' ef he gits off between the shufflin' an' the cut, that's his good luck."

"Suppose a posse o' masked men calls that guard to-night, an' lets the prisoner run free. Won't everybody say that they was Tiger Dick's men, an' that he closed Captain Jack's eye fur 'im, when he got him to box the Teaser fur the night? What fur would he go to such trouble to git the Teaser's neck out o' the halter, ef he wa'n't his man, what he was bound to stand by after he had done his biddin'? An' what was his biddin'? Why, the puttin' o' Iron Despard quietly out o' the way! That's the way they'll talk it. An' then look out fer fun! While they're a-chawin' of each other up, we'll step in, pocket the sawdust, an' slope."

This project was received with enthusiasm; and the men began immediate preparations to carry it out.

From a secret receptacle in the rocks were taken a lot of black masks, which Wat Tigh had caused to be made for just such occasions as this. Then their boots were removed and their feet wrapped in pieces of blanket, to secure a noiseless tread. Lastly, their weapons were

looked to. Then like skulking shadows, they flitted from the spot.

It had been thought sufficient to leave Lige Bigelow a guard of six men, three from each party.

Tiger Dick selected the men from among the supporters of Judge Pettigrew's interests, and Captain Jack selected the others.

They were all men of undoubted pluck and skill with weapons, and, had they been united by a common bond, were capable of making a strong stand against odds. But there was one element of weakness which it was impossible for either the Tiger or Captain Jack to provide against—one of the former's men and two of the latter's were members of Wat Tigh's secret band!

They had heard the call, and knew that something was to come of it. After their selection they were all on the lookout for some communication from their leader; and in the confusion and lack of organization this was not difficult to bring about. Wat brushed by one of them, and guardedly, without looking at him, dropped the words:

"Be ready fur a rescue!"

The fact of belonging to hostile parties did not affect the friendly familiarity which existed between the men in their personal association; so it would excite no suspicion to see one of Judge Pettigrew's men conversing freely with two of Captain Jack's; and the three secret confederates soon came to an understanding, and mapped out their course of procedure to further, as much as possible, Wat Tigh's scheme, whatever it might prove to be.

Judge Pettigrew's man, getting into separate consultation with his two colleagues, said:

"Boys, I reckon the Tiger's up to something."

"He's fly!" said one.

The other assented:

"You bet!"

"Between you an' me an' the lamp-post, don't ye suppose he backed the Teaser fur to accidentally drop a slug between Iron Despard's shoulder-blades?" he continued, insinuatingly.

"He'll never give it away ef he did; an' don't ye furgit it!"

"But ef he takes care o' his man?"

"The galoot that plays into his hand needn't have no fear o' gictin' left."

"That's jest my idee, exactly."

Then this cunning plotter lowered his voice, and said, meaningly:

"Boys, ef that's his leetle game?—hey?"

The three had their heads close together, the other two being really as eager as the plotter appeared to be.

One pulled down his eye, so as to show the white, and smiled knowingly.

The other said:

"Boss, I'm with ye!"

The plotter kept on:

"He'll do it en the sly. He won't want to give himself away."

The reply was:

"That's all right!"

And the end was accomplished. There would be no real opposition from the Pretty Polly men, if a demand was made for the prisoner, no matter what outward appearance the rescuing party might put on. The two who were loyal believed that they would be best serving their leader by breaking the letter of his commands.

The game played by the two traitors in the Little Lucky division of the guard was somewhat different. They affected dissatisfaction with the delay.

"It's a dog-goned deal o' trouble over such a blatherskite," said one, with apparent strong disgust. "Why not hang him out o' hand, an' then straighten the thing out afterward? His infernal carcass ain't worth the loss o' sleep to guard him!"

"Them's my sentiments, pardner," assented the other. "Ef I wa'n't on the guard, blow me ef I wouldn't be one of a party to snake him out o' this an' swing him to the nearest tree."

"Maybe that's boys in our crowd that won't stand it, as it is," continued the first, in a tone that seemed to indicate that he hoped that his suggestion would prove to have a corresponding fact.

"Look a-hyar, gents," broke in Lige Bigelow sternly. "Was we put hyar to guard this hyar prisoner?"

"I reckon we was," admitted one of Wat Tigh's men.

"Waal, we're a-goin' fur to guard him, ef the devil himself comes to the door! You hear me?"

Lige had said his say. When it came time to act, he would be heard from again.

The one true man in his party responded promptly:

"Boss, that's the kind c' talk I like to hear."

But the two plotters had created the effect they desired. If a rescue was effected, they would explain their inactivity by saying that they had supposed it was for the purpose of hanging the prisoner; and that, as they had understood their duty, it was to keep the Pretty

Polly party from running him off, and not to keep their own men from putting his neck into the halter.

Such was the situation, when out of the darkness came a voice, saying:

"Boys, we calls you; we're after the prisoner!"

The voice sounded muffled and unnatural. The speaker had evidently put pebbles into his mouth, and they were an effectual disguise.

In a twinkling Lige Bigelow and his one trusty man had their revolvers in readiness. The traitor in the Pretty Polly division of the guard nudged his companions, and whispered:

"Thar she comes, boys!"

"Ready, men!" commanded Lige Bigelow, in a determined tone.

Then he addressed the yet invisible owner of the voice:

"Who are you? Show yourselves like men. Meanwhile, don't furgit that you'll git more kicks than courtesy ef you come to this shop!"

At a signal from the leader of the assaulting party, more than a score of men started up as if from the ground, and stood as silent and motionless as shadows.

"Boys," said their leader, "you see we've come prepared fur business. We don't want to make no trouble with them as we haint got no quarrel with. We only want—and we're bound to have—the prisoner."

"Then come an' take him," was Lige Bigelow's stout challenge.

Once more he said, in a lower tone:

"Ready, boys!"

"Ay, ay, pardner!" promptly responded the one reliable man.

But the Pretty Polly men were plainly apathetic, and the two Little Luckyites demurred in words.

"Hold on, boss," objected one; "I reckon our skins is worth more than the Teaser's neck. He's bound to swing to-morrer, anyhow."

"Them's my sentiments," seconded the other.

"What fur should we knock over our own men, when we've all agreed that the bloke shall hang?"

The traitor among the Pretty Polly men nudged his comrades again and chuckled, as if they were profiting by a misunderstanding of the opposite party.

"What!" cried Lige, "is my men goin' to crawfish? I don't like the galoot any more'n you do; but we was put hyar to guard him, an' that's jest what I, fur one, propose to do."

"I'm with ye, Cap!" again responded his one trustworthy subordinate.

But the rest were silent.

"Five flunks!" cried Lige in bitter scorn, as he viewed his disaffected men.

"Waal, gents," said the leader of the assailants, "air ye all agreed? Shall we have the pri-oner quiet an' peaceable?"

"Never!" cried Lige, stoutly. "There's but two of us, but we'll soon make music that'll call out more."

Then to his faithful supporter he said:

"Fardner, we've got to play a lone hand, but we've got twelve shots apiece."

"Right you are, boss."

"Ready!"

"Ready she am!"

They stood braced.

"Gents," said Lige, "I don't want no bloodshed, fur one. But we're bound to stand by our duty; so you'd better clear out, an' come back in the mornin' with a requisition from Judge Lynch."

For answer, the leader of the assailants said:

"Let them that wants to keep a skin what'll hold their reg'lär mornin' bitters stand to one side!"

"We're in fur it," whispered Lige. "Let's git in the fust lick. Ready!"

But just as he raised the hammer of his revolver, ready to open the battle, a million stars seemed to start out of the black heavens, like the bursting of a rocket, and then all was darkness and oblivion.

He had received a blow on the head with the revolver-butt of one of his own men.

He reeled and fell to the ground.

At the same moment the arm of the only other man true to his duty was clutched.

"Hold on, pardner! What's the use o' throwin' yer life away?"

The man saw that he stood alone. It was sheer foolhardiness for him to offer further resistance.

"Waal, gents," he said, "you all witness that I stood by my duty till the bottcm fell out. Go ahead with yer rat-killin'. I pass out."

He put up his weapons, and went and sat down on a stone.

The guard had been grouped before the door of the hut. They now stood aside.

Silently the masked leader and two of his followers entered, while the others stayed without, perhaps to see that the guard did not summon assistance.

Teddy the Teaser had overheard the colloquy, and was fully persuaded that he was to be hanged. Who could have any interest in saving his neck?

But the craven spirit was ready to wallow in the dust even when there was no hope.

He was found on his knees, and he immediately began to whine:

"Gentlemen! gentlemen! fur God's sake! I'm an innocent man—"

"Bahl you coyote! Git up!"

And Wat jerked him to his feet.

"Remember, if you make any outcry, I'll ram this byar revolver down yer throat!"

And he actually thrust the muzzle of the weapon into the open mouth of the trembling wretch.

Then he went on, bissing into his ear:

"You dog-gone fool! we've come to let you cut stick. What's your worthless carcass to us? We only don't propose to leave you the chance to blow on better men. Come, brace up! Hyar! put this inside yer jacket. Maybe it'll put some heart into ye."

And he next thrust the neck of a whisky-flask into the Teaser's mouth.

This was certainly preferable to the tube of a revolver.

Teddy took several swallows mechanically.

Then he was thrust forward by the two men, while Wat, from sheer contempt at the way his knees knocked together with fear, added a vigorous kick in the rear.

"Gents, you'll oblige by steppin' inside," said Wat to the guard.

They complied, though not without a show of reluctance. Lige Bigelow was dragged in and left with them. Then Wat prepared to shut the door.

"Hold on, boss," objected one of the men. "What fur air we to be left in byar like rats in a trap?"

"Ye'll have till mornin' to guess yer own riddele," replied Wat, and wi'out further ceremony closed the door and secured it on the outside.

Then, as noiselessly as they had come, the rescuers slipped away, and all was as silent as the grave.

Teddy the Teaser was stupefied. He could scarcely believe the evidence of his senses when, at some distance from the camp, a bundle of provisions was put into his hands, and a moderate supply of money and a flish of whisky into his pocket, and he was set at liberty with the terse command:

"Git!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

A BOLD STAND.

For once in his life Tiger Dick had been completely "done." But contingencies will arise which the greatest foresight cannot anticipate; and if the men of Fool's Luck had been assured that he was dealing with them "on the square," they would have held him blameless in this case.

He was up and out early, yet not so early as the guard imprisoned in their own "calaboose."

The three members of Wat Tigh's band were willing to remain, in order to give their principal ample opportunity to carry out his scheme, whatever it might be; Lige Bigelow was unconscious; and the man who had stood by him was almost equally apathetic.

"Play your own game, gents," he said. "I was fur fightin'; you outvoted me, and pitched the trump; so byar I set. I can stand it as long as the rest."

The other two, who believed that the rescuers were under the authority of Tiger Dick, waited for some intimation from him that they might come forth.

But as the hours of the night passed, there was ample time for reflection; and reflection brought doubts. The first gray streaks of dawn assured them that nothing could be gained by longer inactivity; so they burst open the door and raided the nearest saloon for an "eye-opener."

All Fool's Luck was astir early; for every one anticipated "fun" for that day. But the event differed widely from their expectations. The bird had flown.

Great was the pretended amazement of the two members of Tigu's band who had represented the Little Lucky interests in the guard, when they failed to find the body of their late prisoner dangling from a tree; and equally great was the seeming wrath with which they swore that they must have been taken in by a trick of the Tiger.

Lige Bigelow had been restored to consciousness. He was not so talkative as the rest.

"Gents, I've jest this to say—I done my level best; an' I'm bound to testify that Billy Filkins stood by me like a man."

So it was that when Tiger Dick strolled down the street in his usual nonchalant way, he met black looks on every side.

Of course he saw at once that something was wrong; but he showed no sign of disturbance. This "looked bad" to the men.

"He's a-goin' to brave it out," they said.

The Tiger entered the Bower and greeted Belle pleasantly, expressing regret at her evident illness. His first lightning glance had discovered Lige Bigelow, with a wrathful look on his usually good-humored face; but he sipped his wine coolly, as if nothing was amiss.

When it was done, he went over to Lige.

"You appear to be off your post. How is

that?" he asked, with no trace of censure, however.

"Waal, boss," replied Lige, rather doggedly, "I allow thar ain't much use watchin' a last-year's bird's-nest."

Tiger Dick looked at Bigelow narrowly for a moment. Then he said, with a quietness that was felt by every witness of the interview:

"A last-year's bird's-nest! What do you mean?"

It was now Lige's turn to scan his interlocutor's face for a moment in silence. Then he replied:

"I allowed that it wa'n't necessary to give you points."

"You are mistaken. Please act as if you supposed me in entire ignorance."

The Tiger's face was inscrutable. If he knew or suspected what had happened, he gave no sign.

"Waal," said Lige, "ef ye don't know, I suppose ye ought to be told that a posse o' masked men come around last night, and done us out of our prisoner."

The Tiger did not start. Neither face nor voice betrayed any evidence of surprise.

"How was it that this was accomplished without creating any disturbance?"

No meaning intonation turned the question into a sneer; yet Lige flushed with rising anger, as he said:

"Boss, ye needn't call me coward in words. Ef you was thar you'll know, and ef it was only your men they'll tell ye that I stood to the rack, two to twenty, until I was knocked out o' time by a blow I didn't see. Hyar comes the rest o' the guard. Let 'em speak fur themselves. They'll give ye partic'lars."

The others entered, accompanied by a crowd. They had seen Dick enter the Bower, and had followed after.

Among them was Captain Jack. He was white with fury. He did not lack the pluck to attack the Tiger, notwithstanding all the prestige of his name.

"Well," was his salute, "what have you got to say?"

Tiger Dick did not seem to notice his rather cavalier manner.

"Nothing," he replied, pleasantly, "until I have heard a little more about what has happened. Sit down, and we'll talk it over. Miss Belle, it is my treat. Give the boys whatever they call for. Captain Digby and I will have champagne."

Captain Jack's first impulse was to offer the Tiger an insult which a Western man does not easily brook, by refusing his hospitality. But on second thought he sat down. Dick ignored his momentary hesitation.

As for the boys, they never put a fine edge on sentiment when free drinks were in the other scale of the balance.

"Now, then, that we are comfortable," said the Tiger, when the wine was before them, "let's have all the particulars. One at a time. What have you to say of last night's occurrence, gentlemen?"

Each gave his account of the affair and the motives which had governed his action or inaction.

"So," said the Tiger to the two traitors in the Little Lucky section of the guard, "you believed that your friends had come to hang the prisoner?"

"That's so, boss," was their reply.

"The fact that he is not dangling from some of the trees proves that you were mistaken. And you"—turning to the three to whom had been intrusted Judge Pettigrew's interests—"seem to have believed that I, or some one under my instructions, had come to set the prisoner free?"

"Yas."

"A marked difference of opinion, truly! I will speak further of your views presently. But, Messrs. Bigelow and Filkins, we haven't heard your impressions yet. What did you think of the rescuing party, and why did you oppose them?"

"It wa'n't none o' my dog-gone business who er what they was," replied Lige. "I was put thar to watch the prisoner, an' I done it."

"I subscribe to that thar, *in toto!*" said Billy Filkins, impressively.

"Gentlemen," said Dick, addressing the crowd, quietly, "we had two honest men on that guard. If we had made equally good selections in the other five our prisoner would still have been in custody. As it is, they betrayed their trust, view it in the best light you can."

The delinquents began to defend themselves, urging the plea that they thought they were serving their respective parties.

Ignoring the others, Tiger Dick turned to the three he himself had appointed, and said, with a tinge of bitterness and sternness not before heard in his voice:

"You forgot that I vouched for the security of the prisoner. Have you no conception of the honor of a gentleman?"

As he spoke he rose to his feet, and there was something almost kingly in his mien.

"Gentlemen," he said, "Tiger Dick's word is backed by his life! When the integrity of my

purpose was questioned yesterday, I pledged you that if the prisoner was not forthcoming when wanted I would stand in his place. I now ask twenty-four hours in which to recover him. If I fail, I will make good my word, and abide in my own person whatever sentence you pass upon him."

A very bad man may yet be a very brave man; and the greatest scoundrel may have a pride which can be counted on to hold him to his own standard of honor.

In that crowd no one thought of doubting that Tiger Dick would do exactly as he promised, even to the periling of his life. Moreover, it was not necessary for him to expressly deny complicity with the party that had liberated the prisoner. Even Captain Jack believed that he was free from blame. And Captain Jack was generous enough to express his belief on the spot.

Offering his hand, he said, in his whole souled way:

"Pardner, put 'er thar! That'll show that I don't bear malice. I like a squar' man, an' I believe you're one."

Tiger Dick took the proffered hand, his face expressing keen pleasure.

"My friend," he said, smiling, "I think you're beginning to see why Iron Despard and I could fight an honest fight without making faces at each other."

"I do, I y jingo!" cried Captain Jack. "An' I'll say right byar, ef you kin git any points on me through sharper wit, you're welcome to all you gain."

"Be assured I'll do my best," laughed the Tiger.

"An', pardner," cried Captain Jack, "going the whole figure" while his heart was "on the rise," "I allow every man in camp that wasn't in last night's business will help ye find the Teaser an' to nose out the party that freed him. Eh, boys!" appealing to the crowd.

The men, who were as pleased as they were astonished by the new turn of affairs, made the room ring with a hearty cheer.

In looking over the crowd to thank them with a bow and a smile, Tiger Dick encountered one glance radically different from all the rest. A look of despair and anguish was in Belle the Beautiful's eyes. She was saying to herself:

"He wins them all; and all the time he is deceiving them. Oh, what can I do—I, a woman and alone—against such a man! He knows that he will be perfectly safe standing in the Teaser's stead. Was he his hired assassin, after all? And is—is—"

But she could follow her thoughts no further. Without warning, heart-wrung tears blinded her eyes. Was it in vain that she held as hostage the drugged sleeper up stairs? Had Judge Pettigrew put it out of his power to restore Iron Despard, even as the ransom price of his daughter?

It was not long before Tiger Dick found opportunity to speak to her without being overheard.

"Why do you still doubt me?" he asked. "Of all the persons in the room, you are the only one who does not feel kindly toward me."

"More's the pity!" was her bitter reply.

"But why?" he persisted, searching her face narrowly.

She felt that she must be on her guard. It was hazardous talking to him at all. Some chance word might awaken his suspicions of her instrumentality in the removal of Polly, when he came to learn of her disappearance, if he had not yet heard.

And yet she must meet him boldly.

"Because," she answered him, affecting the slang with which she habitually disguised her real superior self, "I alone drop to your deep game."

"What game?" he asked, with a look of curious interest.

"You know, and I know, that Iron Despard never shook Captain Jack of his own accord. He was too square for that."

"Well?"

"Then what has become of him?"

"What reason have you for thinking that I should know, any more than you?"

"Who was most interested in putting him on the shelf?"

"Well," with a light laugh. "I suppose anything that cripples the Little Lucky is to the advantage of the Pretty Polly."

"Exactly. And you run the Pretty Polly."

"From which you argue—"

"That you hired Teddy the Teaser to waylay and kill Iron Despard!"

She was quivering with pain and passion. The words choked her. Tears welled into her eyes in spite of her fierce will. She dashed them away, in a fury at her own weakness. They interfered with the scrutiny with which she sought to read this man's soul.

She had purposely made her words misleading. After that, he could not suspect her of insincerity—that she knew anything of the real state of the case. What she really feared—what was wringing her heart and had given to her words their seeming simplicity—was that the Teaser had really been suborned to murder.

But her direct accusation was as ineffectual against Tiger Dick's perfect self-poise as an arrow glancing from plate-mail. Her powerlessness, his strength, drove her to despair.

"Miss Belle," he said, gravely, "I regret that you should rate me so low. If you will accept the assurance of one who scorns deliberate lying as cowardly, I give you my word of honor that you are entirely mistaken—that I never saw Teddy the Teaser until he was dragged, a prisoner, into Fool's Luck last night—that I never employed him, nor has any one with my knowledge, to lift a finger against Iron Despard—that, unless he found it, as he says, I have no idea, any more than you have, how he came by the pouch which was identified as Col. nel Dangerfield's. Not the least humiliating feature in this affair, is that one of your intelligence could suppose me capable of employing such a weakling in such business, and then leaving him to stumble headlong into exposure. Is there any reliance to be placed in such a fellow? Wouldn't he betray me the moment he found himself in a strait?"

"Then what has become of him?" asked Belle, in despair, meaning Iron Despard.

But before Dick could answer, there came an interruption which warranted him in ignoring the question.

Pale and anxious, Judge Pettigrew hurried in and clutched him by the arm.

CHAPTER XXV.

TIGER DICK'S DEFEAT.

"I HAVE been looking for you everywhere," he said, and almost dragged him from the saloon.

Out of doors he placed Polly's note of appeal in his hand.

"See! It is all up. We have got to produce him, and at once."

"Coolly! coolly, judge!" said the Tiger, dropping the earnest manner with which he had just been addressing Belle the Beautiful, and returning to his wonted bantering. "Keep your head—that's my motto. Nothing is gained by excitement and flurry."

"But I tell you sir, this is no time nor subject for trifling," cried the judge, impatiently. "Do you ask me not to get excited when one of these devils holds my daughter in his power? Where is she? What may she not be suffering? To what danger is she exposed?"

In an ecstasy of fury and pain, the father burst into a torrent of impotent profanity.

"Let's see," said Dick, coolly reading the letter aloud. "'Darling papa—I write you under peril of my life. If Colonel Dangerfield is not returned to his friends alive and well, I shall be killed, and my body be left on your door-step. Your agonized daughter—Polly.' And by way of postscript:—'Oh, papa—dear, dear papa! save me! If you love your wretched child—' The penmanship shows that this was written in great perturbation of mind. The writer evidently believed that she stood in mortal danger. But she was a woman; and women are not good judges of such matters. The composition is rather too terse and forcible for ordinary young-lady rhetoric. Therefore I infer that it was dictated, at least in substance. I doubt whether there is any one in the camp, save ourselves and your cultivated daughter, who could dress it in just this style. The proposition to lay her dead body on your door-step is rather more in character—"

But here the tortured parent broke in upon his analysis with a burst of ungovernable fury.

"Death and devils! Are we to waste time in this shilly-shallying? I'd have you understand that I consider your facetiousness in bad taste, and if you have nothing better to offer—"

But the Tiger quietly interrupted him, as he folded the note, matching the edges of the paper carefully and creasing it with his thumbnail.

"My dear sir, what more do you know of this abduction?"

The judge's wrath was checked in full course. He had a bewildered sense of amazement at the power of this man, who himself seemed proof against any outward influence. He stood dumb.

"When do you think it happened?" asked Dick, helping him out.

The judge told his encounter with the inebriate, his use of the lantern, and the finding of the note, in the morning, beneath the lamp, which, taken with the fact that Polly's bed had not been slept in, pointed to the night before as the time of her disappearance.

"And you suppose this Joe Kidder to be a party to the outrage?"

"Why else was he there?"

"The crack on the head would seem to indicate hostility rather than complicity. He probably came upon the abductors or abductor—for there was no need of more than one to frighten a woman into following him without resistance—at an inopportune time. The fact that he was silenced with the butt of a revolver, instead of a knife, goes to show that the villain may not be so bloodthirsty as the door-step threat was intended to convey. But our next step is plainly to interview Kidder."

Without wasting further time in vain specu-

lation, they immediately entered upon their quest, and after much fretting and fuming on the part of the judge, which Dick did not deign to try to allay, the inebriate was found asleep in the sun, under the lee of a friendly shanty wall.

Dick had instructed the judge to let him make the examination in his own way, without interruption.

He now unceremoniously kicked the drunkard into wakefulness, shouting:

"Here, Johnny! Brace up!"

With his wonted cool indifference to ordinary methods of procedure, he borrowed the judge's flask, and, having drawn the stopper, he, to the amazement of its owner, thrust it under the nose of the frowzy vagabone, to baste the slow emergence of his fuddled brain from the fog of stupor.

"Take something, my Christian friend," he said, encouragingly.

And looking up with a grin of mild wonder, Joe Kidder accepted the good the gods sent, without question, and with a promptness that was "not slow."

Grasping the flask with both hands, and pressing his lips to his mouth in a salute as close, as clinging as a bridegroom's first fond kiss, he elevated it at an angle of forty-five degrees, and while regarding the donor with generous gratitude and profound content, let its contents run down his throat in a stream interrupted only by the involuntary contraction of his gullet in the act of swallowing. As for stopping for breath, he evidently knew that he would have all his life to breathe in after this river of delight had ceased to flow.

But Dick had retained hold of the bottom of the flask, and presently he reversed the angle of inclination in spite of the reproachful protest in Kidder's eyes.

"Hold on, Joseph," he said. "The slower you get away with this the longer it will last. Meanwhile, without troubling you to exert yourself more than is absolutely necessary, we beg to present a few questions. Take your time in answering them, so as to make no mistake. In the first place, what were you doing in the neighborhood of Judge Pettigrew's house last night?"

"Waal, boss, I went round thar to ask his honor ef he'd be so kind as to gimme the loan o' two bits, ag'in' what would be comin' to me when we'd polished off Captain Jack an' his gang."

"Joseph, that's as straight as if you had got the answer out of your catechism. Take another pull, as a reward of merit—going to the head of the class with a blue ticket. There! that will do. Now, whom did you see at the judge's house, and how was you received?"

The answer was not quite as ready this time. Joe scratched his head in perplexity.

"Waal, boss," he said, finally, "to give it to ye straight, things gits a leetle mixed right thar. I meets somebody in the dark, au' I says, 'Hallo, judge—is that you?'—an' then—waal then the judge he flashes a lantern in my face, an' he says, 'You jest clear out!' An' that seems to be all," concluded Kidder, yet plainly not very clear in his recollection of events.

"Johnny," said the Tiger, "you're as square as a die—that's plain; and an honest man, you know, is the noblest work of God. Take another pull, as a reward of merit—going to the head of the class with a blue ticket. There! that will do. Now, whom did you see at the judge's house, and how was you received?"

"The devil you say!" was Joe's astonished ejaculation.

"Calm yourself, Joseph. Take another nip. And now try to recall the appearance of the stranger, and describe him to us."

Joe Kidder stared steadily at the Tiger. Even when the flask was put to his lips, he drank without removing his eyes, or blinking. His mind, such as he had left, was busy groping after the last links in the broken chain of recollection.

"Boss," he said, "I disremembered it; but now you've jogged my head-piece, it's all a-comin' back. It wa'n't the judge, an' that's a sure-enough fact. It was a galoot about six foot in his stockin's, with a black mask over his phiz. I jest see him reach fur me, an' then the next thing was the judge, byar, an' his lantern."

"A mask!" repeated the Tiger, with a look of intelligence, instantly associating the abductor of Polly Pettigrew with the liberators of Teddy the Teaser—a natural, yet fatal, mistake. "Joe, you have a jewel of a memory. It fastens upon the significant facts as if by instinct. Drink a bumper to all discriminating memories. And

now, you can give us no further details as to dress, whiskers, voice!"

"It was too dark to make anything out, boss; an' he didn't speak. Besides, to tell ye the truth, I was drunk—blamed drunk!"

"Was there ever such simplicity—such truthfulness!" cried the Tiger, as if carried away with enthusiasm. "My friend, I don't know which to admire most—your memory or your honesty. Let this speak for me."

And he g've the judge's flask unreservedly into the hands of the sot who had now served his purpose.

It is perhaps needless to say that it did not leave his possession until drained.

Then the Tiger went on:

"But you show signs of weariness. Don't continue to sit up on our account. Lie down in your old comfortable position; and if it isn't too much effort to hold your mouth open, I will still minister to your wants."

Joe's eyes were swimming and his head was heavy and unsteadily balanced. Assisted by the Tiger, he lay back and, seeing Dick produce his own flask, opened his mouth, as directed.

Then the Tiger, not letting the mouth of his flask come in contact with the rather questionable-looking lips of the sot, proceeded to pour the liquor down his throat, stopping when it was necessary to give him a breathing spell, so as to avoid strangulation.

But Kidder soon snored in drunken slumber, when the friend who had proved all too kind said:

"Deep sleep, my cherub, and pleasant dreams!"

Then, as if suddenly recollecting to restore the judge's flask, he tendered it with a:

"Beg pardon!"

The judge threw it away with a snort of disgust.

Dick affected a look of questioning surprise; but restrained from comment.

"Well?" said the judge, as they turned away.

Tiger Dick understood this as a demand for his conclusions. He proceeded to give them unreservedly.

"First, the man who abducted your daughter is also the leading spirit of the men who liberated Teddy the Teaser. He is a man of method and resource; since he is working for a definite end in a systematic way, and commands men and operates them with secrecy. He is in the interests of Captain Jack, since he is working for the restoration of Iron Despard, and the downfall of your humble servant in the influence he has gained over the men of both parties. He is a man of intelligence; since he has proved shrewd enough to straddle both chances—the Teaser's innocence, as well as his guilt. In the latter case no harm could come of working the assumption that we held and could restore Iron Despard; in the former, he had us dead to rights by virtue of holding a hostage in exchange for which we would resign everything. It's a beautiful situation, judge. By Jove! I love that fellow no matter who he may prove to be. He has paid me the compliment to believe that I would not kill a man, when I could accomplish the same end by holding him a prisoner for a time. Of course he must have reasoned this out in advance; otherwise he would have had no inducement to gain possession of your daughter. Afterward he doubtless frightened her into telling him all that she knew, which was only confirmation of his own shrewd logic. Some men would have stopped there. Not be! When I proposed that the Teaser be held over night, vouching that I had none but the straightforward purpose of securing justice, he saw his chance of discrediting my word of honor, by running off the prisoner, and leaving the appearance of treachery dead against me. That, sir, was the work of a man with a head on his shoulders. I love him, by my soul. I do!"

So, from the false premise which combined Belle the Beautiful's work with Wat Tigh's, giving to the whole the appearance of a continuous plot, Tiger Dick's chain of reasoning led him to a fatally erroneous conclusion. It effectually screened both the real actors; because it set him to looking in the wrong quarter.

"The question is," he went on, "who is the man?"

He looked straight into the judge's eyes, though evidently with his attention centered within his own brain.

"That was a strange change on the part of Captain Jack," he went on, presently. "Why should he so readily fall in with the view that I was honest in the matter of the Teaser's liberation—unless he knew all about it?"

So he drifted further and further from the truth, events taking a false significance from the mistaken light in which he viewed them.

"Meanwhile," interrupted the judge, who had listened thus far with very little sympathy, "we are just where we started. Iron Despard must be given up, to get back my daughter."

"Unless," subjoined the Tiger, "we can discover her place of concealment and regain possession of her without paying the ransom."

"But do you suppose I will permit my child

to be a bone of contention among a horde of devils! They may kill her, if they see that they are about to lose her."

"My dear judge, do you consider Captain Jack Digby a very sanguinary individual—a man likely to murder women in cold blood?"

"Well, no."

"Depend upon it, your daughter has nothing more dreadful to fear than that same Captain Jack. She is probably now held in company with Teddy the Teaser. I have twenty-four hours in which to look up that individual; and the quest of one will be the quest of the other. I ask you to wait patiently twenty-four hours, before yielding to the demand of the enemy. I purposely put Joe Kidder out of the way of betraying his part in the affair. You need say nothing to any one of the disappearance of your daughter."

After some further argument Judge Pettigrew was induced to accede to this plan.

Then the Tiger went earnestly to work. Between that time and midnight he interviewed every man and woman in the camp, putting them through cross-examinations which left him morally certain of the guilty knowledge of some of them, though neither bribes nor threats could shake their unqualified denials. He employed several women to set the men drunk, and use all their wiles to worm the secret out of them; but in the end he was forced to admit signal failure.

Meanwhile, Belle the Beautiful had got hold of Captain Jack, and by the eloquence of her vehement passion, had talked him over to her view of Tiger Dick's deportment.

She had an ulterior object in this. If Iron Despard was alive, Tiger Dick would know it, and certainly would not go to his death for a crime which never had been committed. He might persist to the very brink of the grave, in the hope of ultimately being let off; but when he saw that his enemies would not relent, he certainly would give up Colonel Dangerfield and save himself.

Belle gave Captain Jack no inkling of her abduction of Polly. She was puzzled and made uneasy by the quiescence of the judge. Did he love his mate better than his daughter? Or was it out of his power to pay the ransom? That question kept recurring with crushing force.

All this made her the more anxious to get Tiger Dick under the fatal tree with a noose about his neck.

True to his word, in the morning he gave himself up. He found that Captain Jack took him in charge in a totally different spirit from that which he had manifested the day before. The Tiger saw at once that he had been tampered with; or else the previous theory was right—he had been playing a part.

However, the Tiger felt no particular anxiety. If the worst came to worst, Iron Despard could be given up.

He was soon to learn, however, that the hunter who sets traps may get his foot in them himself.

While preparations were being made for the trial, Captain Jack was called aside. He found a Chinaman who demanded to see "Tligab Dick." It was one of the Celestials whom the Tiger had defended from the assault of Wat Tigh.

John's agitation made Captain Jack suspect something of importance, and he easily persuaded him to intrust his communication to him.

With much voluble chatter and excited gesticulations, the Chinaman told his story. Captain Jack turned pale and stern as he listened. Then he returned to the meeting and addressed it:

"Gentlemen, I've just dropped onto something that'll have to be looked into before we go on with this trial. The prisoner will be held under guard; and the court stands adjourned until you hear from me further."

Every one was eager to learn what had "turned up;" but Captain Jack, taking a small party of men with him, left the camp, guided by John Chinaman.

They found the abandoned camp which had afforded Tiger Dick protection from the storm now the scene of ludicrous excitement. The Chinamen capered about and chattered like a lot of frightened monkeys.

But the occasion of their disturbance was solemn enough. In one of the abandoned shafts lay a gory horror. It was a shockingly mutilated corpse. The head and one hand had been hacked off, and were missing; but one glance at the semi-military garb was enough.

"Boys," said Captain Jack, solemnly, "the New Man has passed out;—an' Tiger Dick shall follow him!"

The men swore it in savage, rumbling oaths.

A bier was improvised on which the body was carried to Fool's Luck.

As they entered the camp, the bearers and those that followed in gloomy procession walked bareheaded. This was Captain Jack's idea. He wanted to work up public sentiment against Tiger Dick. He was most successful in this. As he passed through the crowd, he said to them:

"Fall in, gents—fall in, all that's on the side

o' law an' order, an' against midnight assassination!"

Not only the Little Luckyites, but all of Wat Tigh's secret band, and, led by their example, many others of Judge Pettigrew's men, formed in the rear of the slowly-moving procession. It marched and counter-marched up and down the one street until nearly all the men in the camp had been drawn into it, while the women stood and watched it, shuddering.

Judge Pettigrew saw it! Then, as if pursued by the Furies, he fled the camp. Stumbling among the crags, torn by brambles, he rushed on and on, wild-eyed, ghastly, with chattering teeth! He reached a mountain cave and entered, groping in the Stygian darkness, and shouting till his voice rose to an eldritch shriek. He called on Bill Rogers; but only weird echoes answered him. His cries were multiplied until the cave seemed tenanted by a lot of howling dervishes.

Then he stood still and listened; and the awful silence terrified him.

How, he did not know, but somehow he made his way out of that tomb of horror once more into the sunlit, living world.

He found a pine-knot, lighted it, and with this lurid torch plunged again into the bowels of the earth.

His hurrying feet rushed along every corridor; his blood-shot eyes peered into every cranny; again his voice penetrated everywhere, startling the bats that came flapping about, striking against his face and burning themselves in his torch until they threatened to extinguish it.

His quest was as vain as before.

Exhausted, he stumbled; the torch fell from his hand and went out; in the darkness he sunk to the earth in a swoon.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE EXECUTION.

CAPTAIN JACK was a man of generous impulses. We have seen how ready he was to give Tiger Dick his hand, on the day before, when the latter appeared in the role of a frank foe. Looking back upon that scene, he now felt that his good nature had been imposed upon—that he had been "taken in." His resentment toward the man who (he believed) had practiced upon him, was correspondingly keen.

The mutilation, too, made the crime the more odious. Captain Jack resolved to hang Tiger Dick out of hand.

His own men were naturally ready to support him from partisan feeling; while, of Judge Pettigrew's men, many were under the secret control of Wat Tigh, and most of the rest, attached to that side only through mercenary motives, found no genuine sentiment of loyalty to oppose their native brutal instincts, which urged them to any deed of violence—the more murderous, the more attractive.

The "court" was again convened, and the prisoner brought forth, to be tried in the presence of his supposed victim, the body being placed directly before the box on which Judge Lynch (in the person of Captain Jack) was elevated.

Dispassionate resolve had given Captain Jack an unaccustomed dignity; and the crowd caught something of his stern solemnity.

They stood in silence—a portentous silence—so Tiger Dick was marched into their midst. He felt the change in them. He knew that the crisis of his life was at hand.

There was no blanching, as this conviction settled down upon him. He smiled cynically, as he glanced from face to face.

When he saw the corpse no start betrayed the surprise he felt. He stood apparently as indifferent as if he were but a spectator.

"Fellow-citizens," said Captain Jack, "thar's no call to go over the trial of night before last. You all know that it wa'n't quite reg'lar, because we hadn't any conclusive proof of the death of the party the Teaser was accused of havin' killed. You all know who made that point, and how we allowed it—an' got took in fur our trouble!"

"We all l'arn when we was children that the partaker's as bad as the thief; an' by the same reckonin' the man that hires another to murder is as bad, an' deserves the same punishment as the man that strikes the blow."

"If the Teaser wa'n't his man, why did the prisoner run him off in the night, and then pull the wool over our eyes, with his smooth talk, in the morning? Mighty little resk thar was in standin' in the place of the Teaser! Thar ain't a man in the camp but was achin' to say:—'He's squar'—let him go,' an' he knew it."

"But I reckon we've tumbled to his game at last; an' now ef thar's a man in the crowd that don't believe Tiger Dick hired Teddy the Teaser to do that thar bloody business"—pointing impressively to the ghastly corpse—"I'd like to see him show his hand."

Every one looked about for some response; but not a hand appeared. In that hour no man proclaimed himself ready to stand by Tiger Dick.

"Fellow-citizens," went on Captain Jack, "is he guilty, or not guilty?"

A wrathful growl of condemnation rose from the crowd.

"I allow that settles it," said Captain Jack. "Prisoner at the bar, have you anything to say why judgment should not be pronounced upon you, and you be hung by the neck until you be dead, dead, dead, and may God have mercy on your immortal soul!"

It was a wretched parody on judicial form; but its ridiculous aspect did not seem to strike any one except the Tiger.

He laughed, as he changed his quid into the other cheek, and replied:

"Well, perhaps it don't strike you that you are rather railroading me through on the Limited Express. If I am not mistaken, you have overlooked the trifling formality of permitting me to make a defense."

"Now's your time, if you have anything to say."

"Exactly. But perbaps the jury, here, might accept it more graciously if I let some one else speak for me."

"If you want a lawyer—"

"Thanks—only a witness."

Captain Jack saw that the cool Tiger "had him." But Judge Lynch's court is hampered by no technicalities. He reopened the case as informally as he had taken the verdict.

"Waal, that's no more than fair," he said; "an' we're bound to give you every decent show; though it won't make no difference in the end."

"Doubtless!" sneered the Tiger.

"Call your witness," said Captain Jack.

"I'll trouble the court to subpoena Judge Pettigrew."

"Judge Pettigrew is wanted!" shouted Captain Jack.

But the judge was not forthcoming; and after a great deal of commotion in the crowd a man appeared on a stump in the outskirts, crying:

"Hallo, Cap! I reckon thar ain't no show fur to git Judge Pettigrew. I seen him scratchin' gravel up the road as ef the devil was after him the minute the procesh' struck the camp. Reckon he thought things was guttin' blue fur a gent of about his inches, an' lit out."

This grinning volunteer was summoned to the witness stand, and going a little more fully into details, told the jury what the reader already knows of the effect on Judge Pettigrew of a sight of the bloody corpse.

Tiger Dick surmised the true state of the case, and said, with a humorous affectation of deference:

"Gentlemen of the Jury! I think I can put a new light on Judge Pettigrew's apparent flight. The facts of the case are these: When the interests of the Pretty Polly were put into my hands I saw that our friend here, Captain Jack, had the numerical strength on his side, and that it was useless to try to fight him until Iron Despard was put out of the way."

A bowl of fury went up from the crowd at this apparent cool confession of deliberate murder.

Tiger Dick, not at all abashed, waited quietly until order was restored, and went on pleasantly:

"My friends of the jury have put their own construction on my words. Permit me to suggest that I am quite a different person from them. When I propose to put a man out of my way I don't find murder the only means of accomplishing that end. In the case under consideration I planned a little scheme by which Iron Despard could be inveigled into our power and held a prisoner until we had got possession of the disputed lode. After we were secure, he was to be set at liberty, and no harm done. He was so entrapped and confined in a cave under the guard of Bill Rogers. I believed that he was still there while the Teaser was being tried, and that the pouch had actually been found, as he said, having probably dropped from its owner's pocket unobserved while we were carrying him to his place of confinement. That was why I rather objected to the wretch's havin' his neck stretched. As for the judge, he got quite excited about it. I assure you he has a more tender conscience than you give him credit for. He insisted that if the fellow was left to hang he should view himself as his murderer. Now you can imagine the emotions of so sensitive a man upon seeing this body. He doubtless accused himself of having been indirectly instrumental in bringing Iron Despard to his death, and ran off to find Bill Rogers, to learn how he had permitted harm to befall his prisoner. You will probably find him at or near the cave."

He then described its location by landmarks which those familiar with the country would easily recognize.

"We're bound to give you every show, though I reckon you're only gainin' time;—unless," added Captain Jack, with a sudden flash of suspicion, "you're tryin' to draw the judge and Bill Rogers into the same box with yourself. Most likely it was a four-handed game—you three an' the Teaser."

This view of the case was caught up by the crowd with avidity. A party was immediately formed to go in quest of the judge.

They went, and found—the empty cage!

But on their way back a sudden shout was raised. Those who had given utterance to it leaped away; and in a moment there was the headlong rush of a life chase, with a human quarry.

Judge Pettigrew had recovered from the partial syncope to which he had succumbed, and was wandering about in a state of bewildered indecision, equally afraid to fly or return to the camp, when he was discovered by the party sent in quest of him.

He at once jumped to the conclusion that he was being pursued as a murderer, and in blind panic fled at the top of his speed.

Over the rocks and through the brambles went the chase. Never hare and hounds so vied in feats of agility. But in the end the muscles trained to endurance won. Lacerated, ragged and half-dead with exhaustion, the fugitive was run down. Pale, panting and as limp as a rag, they had almost to carry him back to camp. There the wild eyed wretch was scarcely recognizable. He looked the picture of guilt. His face alone condemned him.

Never had a man in jeopardy of his life so sorry a witness as his sole dependence. The judge, cowering and shivering, glared about him as if fallen into imbecility. He corroborated any words that were put into his mouth, seizing upon them as a drowning man clutches at anything floating near; but he seemed incapable of giving any coherent testimony un-prompted.

Tiger Dick saw the futility of it, and ended the farce.

"Hold on, gentlemen," he said. "It's sheer cruelty to animals to torture him any further. As a coward he takes the champion's belt. I reckon I'm booked for glory; so you'd better be getting your rope ready. But let him go. I give you my word that he has had nothing whatever to do with the murder of Iron Despard. It must have been through the treachery of Bill Rogers, or else in spite of him. He's the man that knows, if you only had him here. You may believe me. What personal interest have I in asking you to spare the judge, after I've danced the last figure?"

In one respect Tiger Dick did his employer injustice. It was not merely the fear of death that had so overpowered him, but the ignominy of being hanged as a murderer.

But the rude men who surrounded him like a horde of vengeful satyrs, did not so understand it. Tiger Dick they respected—even admired—or his indomitable pluck; but toward the judge they felt only contemptuous exasperation.

This was like fuel to the flame. Wat Tigh and his band had been assiduously fanning.

The arms and legs of the prisoners were pinioned; they were placed on barrels stood on end, beneath the gibbet. Judge Lynch had appropriated from nature—the spreading cottonwood.

Lige Bigelow, as hangman-in-chief, was about to adjust the nooses about their necks, when a commotion took place which drew all eyes in that direction. A man was seen elbowing his way through the crowd toward the place of execution, with a savage vehemence that would brook no hinderance.

As he thrust the men out of his path, he addressed them in short, sharp, rasping, peremptory ejaculations, which were like the snarls of a savage beast. His words elicited cries of wonder on all sides; and presently, the shout was raised:

"Make way for Iron Despard's brother!"

Then the crowd fell apart as he advanced, leaving his way unobstructed.

A moment he stopped to gaze at the mutilated corpse. The sight seemed to goad him to frenzy.

Then he leaped upon the judge's box to address the crowd.

They saw a man whose resemblance to Iron Despard was enough to establish the claim of near relationship.

There were the same burning black eyes, the same straight nose, the same swarthy complexion; but where Colonel Dangerfield had affected the long drooping mustache, this man wore the bushy beard of the rough-and-ready miner, hiding all his face save nose and eyes and forehead.

The same characteristic difference was traceable throughout. Colonel Dangerfield had been elegant in build; this man was burly. The almost languid grace of the former was replaced by the abrupt, free movements of one who had lived nearer to nature than to men. His voice, too, was deeper; while his dress, by comparison with the care of the other's, was almost uncouth in its carelessness.

But a glance showed that this man was a power, in his way as irresistible as Iron Despard.

"Men of Fool's Luck!" he shouted—and his disregard of the conventional politeness, which requires these rough fellows to address each other as "gentlemen," seemed like the self-assertion of a giant—"this is no time for words. I have come to your camp and found this!"

And he pointed a vibrant finger at the corpse.

A groan of sympathy went up from the crowd.

"This is my work!" he cried, referring to the hanging. "No man shall take my revenge out of my hands."

As of right, he took the nooses from Lige Bigelow and adjusted them to the necks of the prisoners.

The crowd yelled its approval.

Judge Pettigrew seemed incapable of any motion. He looked stupid.

Tiger Dick began to whistle "Pop goes the Weasel."

The executioner drew a brace of revolvers, cocked them, and pointed them at the hearts of the victims of Lynch law.

"When I give the word, kick those barrels from under them."

Lige Bigelow and another placed themselves in position to execute the order.

"Ready! Go!"

The barrels were kicked away.

The bodies dropped.

Two distinct pistol shots rang out.

At the same instant a piercing shriek cut the air like an arrow—so shrill that it was distinctly heard through the yell swelled by the united voices of the entire mob.

The executioner turned and saw Belle the Beautiful borne out of the crowd in a swoon.

CHAPTER XXVII.

WHISKY BEAT HIM.

WHEN Iron Despard awoke from the effects of the narcotic which Polly Pettigrew had administered, he found himself bound hand and foot, crouched on a shake-down of mountain moss, imprisoned in a cave, and guarded and attended by a jailer, whose identity was securely hidden behind a black mask.

Observation having yielded so much, he next took time to clear his brain of the drug and think the matter over. He very soon grasped the situation.

He viewed the treachery of the siren who had lured him into the snare with that gloomy bitterness with which he had regarded all woman-kind since the tragedy of his life. It was a matter of course that she should be a ready tool to the hand of his rival.

As for Tiger Dick, he felt no resentment toward him. It was a game of wits between them, and he had fairly scored the first point.

The next matter to be considered was, how to get out of check.

Physical resistance was plainly out of the question. There remained the arts of diplomacy.

He signaled his jailer.

"See here, pardner," he said, "do you like money?"

Rogers put his finger before his mask just over his lips—the sign of silence.

"Ah, I see," replied Iron Despard. "You are afraid to betray who you are, lest I call you to account after I get out of this."

Rogers shrugged his shoulders.

"Well," said Despard, "you may rest easy on that score. I don't bear malice toward a man who only does his duty. I shall square accounts with your betters, when the time comes. Meanwhile, you can run no risk by indicating to me by signs how much you are to be paid for watching me."

Rogers shook his head—a refusal.

Iron Despard did not yet despair.

"Whatever the amount," he said, "I will guarantee to double it, and secure you from the re-enement of your employers, if you will cut these bonds."

Rogers still shook his head.

"I will double your pay and give you a hundred dollars besides."

Without avail.

"Two hundred—five hundred."

No effect.

"Name your price."

The jailer walked away, sat down on a boulder, and began to kick his heels carelessly.

He was incorruptible—probably through fear.

Iron Despard next ascertained by actual experiment that he had been tied up by a man who understood his business.

He then resigned himself to fate.

His physical wants were attended to by his jailer with a consideration which left nothing to be complained of.

But it was plain that, during the long intervals of inactivity, Rogers found the time hanging heavy on his hands.

He played solitaire with a pack of greasy cards, and mumble-the-peg with his bowie. He even set up stones, and essayed to amuse himself with the boys' game of "duck."

He chewed tobacco until he fairly made himself sick; but Iron Despard noticed that he did not drink. Yet it was incredible that he should be a "teetotaler."

A bright idea struck the prisoner.

"If you could get my flask—"

Rogers pricked up his ears like a war-horse at the sound of a bugle-call. In his eagerness he almost burst into speech. He felt the

pockets of his charge with trembling hands—to no purpose.

"What! have they taken that away from me?" ejaculated Iron Despard, with well-feigned surprise and annoyance. "That's what I call mean. I'm as dry as bone-dust, I say, pardner, can't you give me a sip? You may see the time when you're in my fix yourself."

Rogers shook his head, and walking away, sat down despondently.

The master seemed to rest on Iron Despard's mind. He kept talking about it in a grumbling way. He drew most tantalizing recollections from the past, and dwelt longingly on the delightful sensations of just a taste. He drove poor Rogers nearly mad.

At last he said:

"See here, pardner, I'll give you ten dollars to fetch me one drink. You can do it without the least risk. Ain't I trussed up tight enough, in all conscience? I can't wink an eyelid while you're gone. And nobody will be the wiser. One drink, pardner."

Every fiber of Rogers's being was pleading with him far more eloquently than did the tempter. The end might be foreseen. He yielded.

Iron Despard reasoned that after so unaccustomed an abstinence his jailer would drink himself drunk; and he was ready to avail himself of the opportunities such a situation would offer.

When Rogers reached the cave on his return it was apparent that he was already under the influence of liquor. A glance assured him that his prisoner was just where he had left him. This fact gave him a sense of perfect security. He sat down by himself with the bottle between his knees, caressing it and talking to it, and chuckling inaudibly in enjoyment, forgetful of the fact that at least some portion of it had been got for his helpless prisoner—an oversight of which Iron Despard was careful not to remind him. He was more than welcome to it all; and once unconscious, the other purposed to roll toward him, possess himself of his knife, cut his bonds and stand free!

Rogers began to nod, then to lurch, and finally rolled on the floor of the cavern, to snore in drunken stupor.

Iron Despard's opportunity had now arrived. He was on the point of seizing it, when hope fled before the appearance of another man, en masque.

But by the lurid torch-light, which seemed to drive the shadows from the center of the cavern only to find lurking-places in every angle, he saw that the new-comer moved stealthily, paying the inebriate the compliment of his first attentions, holding a cocked revolver in readiness as he tip-toed forward.

A hasty examination; then with swift movements he glided toward the helpless prisoner, drawing a knife, the polished blade of which flashed back the torchlight.

Iron Despard thought he was to be murdered in cold blood.

"Hold on!" he cried, drawing his feet up with the purpose of using them to the best of his ability in self-defense. "Who are you? Would you assassinate a man bound hand and foot? Coward! give me one hand, with only a cudgel."

"Sh!" cautioned the stranger, with a gesture of strained anxiety, glancing around to see if the sound of Iron Despard's voice had roused his jailer.

But this did not assure Despard of the amity of the intruder. It might only be a trick, to slaughter him the more easily.

The mask evidently perceived his determination to defend himself, for he approached from a direction where he would be out of the reach of the menacing feet.

Despard attempted to roll away, calling lustily for help.

As he turned on his face he was pounced upon and—

CHAPTER XXVIII.

BELLE THE BEAUTIFUL TO THE RESCUE.

THE scene is the Bower.

The time is just about the hour for closing up, on the night preceding the trial of Tiger Dick and Judge Pettigrew.

The characters are Belle the Beautiful and Poky.

"Jest you go right to bed, Miss Belle," said her fac'um. "You're lookin' fit fur the doctor. Don't ye worry; I'll shut up as tight as a drum."

Now, though faithful enough in the discharge of any task set him, give him his time, it was unheard of for Poky to voluntarily assume any burden. Besides, as is usual with those who have no aptitude for finesse, he over-did the role of sympathy, and roused Belle's suspicions.

It required no great subtlety to entrap poor Poky; and pretending to accede to his suggestion, Belle a minute later detected him in the act of filling a bottle with whisky.

She had then but to appear upon the scene, and by a look rout him, horse and foot.

"I—I—I wa'n't a-cribin' of it, Miss Belle," he stammered, trembling in every joint.

"Hyar's the ducats"—opening his hand to show that he had the price of the liquor—"the which I was a goin' fur to drop 'em in the till the fust chainte I got unbeknownst to you, to-morrer. I allow I'm lazy, an' I hain't got much head-piece to speak of; but, glory be to God, I hain't never knocked-down nothin' off o' ye!"

Poky had heard from the lips of an unctuous exhorter the devout expression with which he strengthened his assurance of honesty. No doubt to his foggy brain it had something of the significance of a judicial oath.

"I did not accuse you," said Belle.

"No, ma'am; but you looked it."

"Why should you so understand my looks? Haven't I always trusted you?"

"You have, fur a fact. But—but—"

"You were up to something sly; and it made you feel guilty."

Poky bung his head.

"What do you propose to do with that whisky?"

"Don't ax me that, Miss Belle. I—I—wa'n't to tell."

"So some one has feed you to get whisky on the sly for him."

"Thar's the money fur 't," was all that Poky could urge in justification.

"But, why don't he show his hand like anybody else?"

"That I don't know, Miss Belle. P'raps some galoot's layin' fur him, an' he's run to cover."

"Who is it?"

Poky hesitated.

"Come! out with it! I insist upon knowing. If it was all straight, there would be nothing to keep dark."

"Waal, ef I must, I must. It's Bill Rogers."

"Bill Rogers!"

Belle felt her heart leap into her mouth. Bill Rogers had assisted Tiger Dick and Judge Pettigrew to carry off the unconscious Iron Despard, if Polly's account was to be relied on.

"He swore he was as dry as a lime-kiln—hain't had a nip fur three days—was all rickety in the j'ints an' qualmish in the stomach; an' as how it would be a Christian charity to give him some o' the water o' life. He give me two bits to keep my mouth shut an' bring him a swig, without lettin' nobody see me, soon's we'd shut up."

By this time Belle had quite recovered her self-possession, and had formed her plans.

"Oh! is that all?" she said, in as careless a tone as she could assume. "Well, all I've got to say is that Rogers is getting terribly modest all of a sudden. But if he pays you for waiting on him, that's a matter for you to settle between yourselves. Go ahead, and say nothing about havin' told me, and no harm done. You shut up, and I'll fill the bottle."

Poky was glad to get off so easily.

If he had seen the dark liquid that was dropped into that whisky, while he, all unsuspecting, was clumsily putting up the shutters! If he had seen how Belle the Beautiful almost tore off her woman's dress, to don male attire! If he had seen the shadow that awaited his exit from the saloon, and then flitted after him through the darkness!

How her heart drummed in her ears until she could hardly hear her awkward footsteps; yet how every twig on which she set her foot cried out an alarm! How she hated her eyes as traitors, that they could not pierce the darkness like daylight! If she lost sight of him for but an instant in some denser shadow, she felt a mad impulse to rush headlong forward and clutch him.

So she trailed him—never was easier task—until she saw him join a man who waited in hiding.

"Thunder'n' lightnin'! it must be nigh mornin'!" growled Rogers, as he caught the bottle out of Poky's hand.

"I come as quick as I could."

"That's all right, sonny. Guck! guck! guck!"

The liquor was already going down his throat with a rapidity that threatened soon to drain the bottle.

"Lord love ye! that's the stuff!" he cried, as he took breath. "It's a kindness I'll never forget; an' ef ye'll be on hand to-morrer night with a dose jest like this'n, thar'll be two bits waitin' fur ye ag'in. Now git, an' mum's the word!"

Poky delayed not to take himself off, glad to escape questioning.

Rogers stopped for another "swig," and then slunk off, patting the bottle and talking softly to it.

The shadow followed him.

Far into the mountain fastnesses he went, leading a woman's love to the rescue of its idol.

Belle the Beautiful trailed the man who led her by the heart-strings, until he disappeared in the shadow of a cliff. Then the sound of his footsteps abruptly ceased. Had he, suspecting pursuit, stopped in ambush?

She stood still, her heart almost suffocating her. If she went forward, he might pounce upon her; and she shuddered at recollection of her helplessness in the clutch of Wat Tigh. Or, what was equally as bad, even if she escaped

him, her chance of following him to his destination would be lost. But what if, while she waited, he was even now going further and further away?

Either way, the risk was more terrible, than the hazard of her life. With her heart in her throat, she followed him into the shadow.

A moment later she was leaning against the rock, with her hand pressed to her side, struggling to repress the hysterical inclination to sob aloud, to laugh, to scream.

It was the reaction, after the tension to which her feelings had been wrought. She stood beside the mouth of a cave. The sound of Rogers's footsteps had been muffled by the sand that lay on the floor of the orifice.

So Tiger Dick's care to keep his guard sober proved so extreme as to defeat itself.

What pen can describe the emotions of this woman when, on penetrating the cave, she discovered the man she loved alive and well, and bers the power to restore him to liberty! How she watched Rogers's symptoms of succumbing to the drugged liquor! Then modest dread of being seen in uowomanly dress put her at cross-purposes with Despard. Finally, the knife he feared would pierce his back, freed his hands, instead.

"Hallo!" he ejaculated. "It seems we are having a pantomime farce. But if you came as a friend—pardon my ungracious reception—why do you play dummy, like yonder sot?"

He got no answer.

Instead, his feet were liberated; and, to his boundless astonishment, his rescuer disarmed himself, to thrust revolvers and bowie into his hands!

That ought to have been a most satisfactory answer; but it only gave a new direction and an added intensity to his curiosity.

What manner of man was this that stripped himself to arm a stranger?

"Who are you?" he demanded, as he struggled to his feet.

But instead of replying, his strange rescuer turned as if to fly his presence in trepidation.

Despard had been bound so long that his joints were stiff and shot excruciating pains through him as he attempted to move, while the blood receding from his brain, engorged by his long-continued recumbent posture, made his head swim.

But he would not let this enigmatic friend escape him so.

"Halt!" he cried, in military tones. "Friend or foe, I'll shoot you through the back before you shall leave me this devil's riddle."

With a low, inarticulate cry, his rescuer stopped and stood before him, trembling and with hanging head.

Without a suspicion of the truth, he strode forward and stripped the mask from a face that told the secret of its owner only too plainly.

Those crimson cheeks, those quivering lips, those eyes that dared not lift to his—all spoke with an eloquence that transcended words.

The man stood dumb, gazing at her, until his face seemed to catch a reflection from hers.

He read the fine interplay of motive. He knew by the slight drawing together of her shoulders, that her shame was not so much at the revelation of her love for him unsought as that he should see her in this dress inappropriate to her sex.

When does the vestal flame of modesty so die out that love may not rekindle it!

He had brutally wounded her delicacy, and he knew it.

"I beg your pardon!" he said, removing his hat as he tendered her mask to her.

It was his first act of courtesy—his first involuntary acknowledgment of her womanhood. His tones were infused with that gentleness for which her soul had hungered and thirsted. It brought quick tears to her eyes. They glided like liquid diamonds from beneath her drooped eyelids and traced their courses down her hot cheeks. Her breath came with a tremulous sigh, and all the lines of curvature of her body took on a soft grace.

Iron Despard hardened instantly. The flush ebbed from his cheek to give place to the pallor of rage. Savagely he thrust the mask into her clasped hands, and asked, in stony accents:

"What has happened in Fool's Luck during my absence?"

She told him, only suppressing her encounter with Polly Pettigrew. But his next question laid bare her heart, for she felt powerless to equivocate with his eye upon her, which she felt without having yet glanced up.

"How came you here?"

Then she told him all.

Ab! well that she did not see his teeth set and his brows knit.

But his dead silence chilled her, while she stood waiting the expression of his will.

Suddenly he gave her back her weapons without a word.

Then he strode over to Rogers and tore off his mask.

While looking at the inebriate a thought occurred to him, and he gave it expression at once without turning his head.

"How comes it that you are so apt at disguise?"

"I have been an actress," she replied.

He made no comment on this revelation.

Taking the ropes that had bound him, he tied Bill Rogers as securely, and then lifted him bodily on his shoulder.

"Come!" he said, and strode out of the cave. She followed submissively.

Shifting his limp burden from one shoulder to the other, he carried it with an endurance that seemed to defy fatigue, until he found a place of biding that seemed to satisfy him.

"If I do not live to restore this man to liberty when his presence will not interfere with my plans," he said, "I look to you to remember this place, and see that he is rescued before starvation overtakes him."

Then they passed on, emerging into the mountain road.

They had not gone far when Belle stumbled over something that made her leap away with a shudder and a cry of horror.

Iron Despard struck a match and discovered a man lying on his back in the road. He was dead. His head had been hacked from his body, and his right hand dismembered at the wrist.

Here was one of those tragedies of malignant vengeance which only half-savage men perpetrate. The head that plotted, the hand that executed—this had been the wronged man's requital.

Belle the Beautiful would have fled the accursed spot; but Iron Despard stood thinking. Presently he said to himself, not her:

"This will answer, if—"

Turning abruptly, he asked:

"Have you retained any other disguises?"

"Yes," she replied, wondering.

"Have you a bushy wig and whiskers?"

"I have."

He said no more, but to her horror, picked up the body, and carried it with its dismembered members out of the road.

He made her wait while, taking a part of the dead man's clothes and a part of Bill Rogers's, he effected an exchange, clothing the corpse in his dress. Then he took the body and threw it into a shaft near the Chinamen's hut, purposely leaving traces which would attract their attention.

He then had Belle take him to her house, where he completed his disguise, and washed away the blood-stains which were on the garments he had taken from the murdered man.

"Do nothing to interfere with my purpose," was all that he said as he took his departure, without thanks for the services she had rendered him.

She went up to Polly. The girl lay locked in narcotized slumber. There was now no reason for detaining her longer; but it was too near daylight to attempt to restore her to her home. It should be done on the coming night.

Belle the Beautiful awoke with burning anxiety what the new day would develop, her chief interest centering in Iron Despard.

When he appeared in the character of his own brother, demanding the right to execute his supposed murderers, she was shocked beyond endurance. She noted the ferocity with which he prepared to shoot them, as if not satisfied with hanging alone.

Was this fiend of malignity the man she loved? Could his hatred take such vengeance on men who, at most, had humiliated, by outwitting him?

She saw the drop, heard the shots, and swooned in inexpressible anguish.

And the man who had so trampled on her heart saw others bear her away.

CHAPTER XXIX.

WAT TIGH STRIKES HIS BLOW.

BUT had Belle the Beautiful been nearer, so as to see what actually occurred, an event as astonishing as it was unexpected might have prevented her swoon and held her in amazement, as it did the other witnesses.

Instead of oscillating between heaven and earth, the prisoners fell to the ground. For a moment this was inexplicable. Then the open-mouthed miners saw that the ropes had broken, or been severed in some way.

But before a closer examination could discover the real truth, that, instead of perforating the hearts of his victims, the supposed "brother" had cut the ropes with his bullets, just in time to spare them a severe wrenching of their necks at least, the crowd was still further astonished to see the terrible avenger whisk off wig and whiskers, and stand revealed, Iron Despard in person, bowing and smiling at their bewilderment.

There was a moment of breathless amazement and incredulity. Then the heavens were rent with a yell of delight, and the crowd rushed forward, threatening to trample the prisoners under foot, and even overturn the box which had served the "court" as a "bench," so impetuous were their congratulations.

The hero of the hour was seized by hands and arms and thoroughly shaken. Then he was chaired on the shoulders of his admirers and

borne through the crowd and up and down the street, amid yells and bat-tossing and any and every extravagant manifestation of triumph that occurred to those rude imaginations.

How appearances had so belied the truth they did not stop to inquire until their enthusiasm had somewhat expended itself in outward action. Then, borne back to the scene of the abortive hanging, Iron Despard himself released the prisoners and elevated them above the crowd on one of the boxes.

"And now, gentlemen," he said, pleasantly, "I think this is tit for tat. If you are satisfied, I am, and we'll start in again just where we left off four days ago. If you are agreed we'll let bygones be bygones and say no more about it."

Judge Pettigrew was still stupid with bewilderment, but Tiger Dick laughingly extended his hand.

"Pardner," he said, "I grant you the best of this round, and, if there is any thing in good wishes, may you be treated as handsomely when it comes your turn to be hanged."

Iron Despard grasped the judge by the shoulder to rouse him and whispered:

"Have you told any one of the disappearance of your daughter?"

"No," replied the judge, mechanically.

"Then say nothing. She will be restored to you uninjured. No one need know of her part in this matter."

"Thank you."

"Gentlemen," said Iron Despard, addressing the crowd, "just what has occurred and how it has occurred is of importance to none but those immediately involved. It is only necessary to say that no attempt has been made against my life, either by these gentlemen or by Teddy the Teaser. It has been a fair game of wits, which I am willin' to call so far a drawn battle. Now, let's to work again."

"But not until we have wet our whistles all round," proposed Tiger Dick. "Gentlemen, to the Bower!"

They repaired thither en masse.

Poky was found at the bar.

But this did not suit Tiger Dick.

"Such an occasion cannot be properly celebrated without the presence of the presiding divinity," he said. "Young man, fetch out your mistress."

This demand was seconded all round.

Poky was about to go for her when she appeared in the doorway leading to her private apartments.

She had heard Tiger Dick's ringing tones.

She was very pale, but the agony which had turned her face to stone when she thought Iron Despard a deliberate murderer had been supplanted by a softened look.

Her eyes sought Despard's face, but he did not look at her. His countenance had hardened again.

Tiger Dick bailed her cheerily.

"Priestess of the Temple of Concord, pour us your libation of nectar! There is harmony once more on high Olympus!"

She served them without stint, replying to Tiger Dick's persistent badinage with evident effort.

"And now, gentlemen, to work," urged Iron Despard, and drawing off his men he led them to the Little Lucky.

Tiger Dick followed his example, after having sent a man to release Bill Rogers, whose whereabouts was communicated to him by Iron Despard.

Underground the work progressed in downright earnest. The wall of ore was well nigh blasted through. They were henceforth to work day and night.

Belle the Beautiful, who from loss of sleep and high tension of anxiety was nearly prostrated, slept all day, with her arm resting on Polly Pettigrew so that the slightest movement would awaken her. From the time of Iron Despard's restoration she had discontinued the administration of the narcotic, and expected that its effects would be sufficiently slept off by night to permit her to arouse Polly and convey her to her home.

Polly woke of her own accord; but her eyes were heavy and she would soon have relapsed again into stupor, if Belle had not shaken her and spoken to her sharply to arrest her attention. A bottle of ammonia thrust under her nostrils set her nerves to tingling, and brought her fully to a consciousness of her surroundings.

"Listen to me," said Belle. "I am about to take you back to your home. Your treachery has been defeated—never mind how. You are to ask no questions and answer none. Before I release you, you must swear never to reveal anything connected with your removal from your father's house."

At Belle's dictation, Polly took the required oath.

Then Belle dressed herself once more in her disguise; and as they had entered they passed out into the night, and made their way back to the vicinity of Polly's home.

Here Belle, unwilling to risk detection, if the judge happened to be at home on the lookout for his daughter's return, parted with Polly—

a needless precaution, since the latter, having made the rest of the way alone, found the house deserted.

This was not the result of heartlessness, but the father, himself solicitous enough, had been induced by Tiger Dick to leave the coast clear, as the most likely means of securing his child's immediate return.

Knowing nothing of this motive, Polly experienced keen disappointment, which, when she had struck a light, found vent in tears. Terror was added to her sense of utter forlornness, when she felt drowsiness once more creeping over her.

To fall asleep there alone! So fearful was the thought that she leaped to her feet, trembling. And yet she was afraid to venture out into the night, to make her way to her father's mine—that father whose love had left her to her fate! That was a bitter thought; and she wept as she prepared some strong tea, to counteract the drug that still permeated her system.

Then she walked the floor, to keep that fatal lethargy at bay.

But her imagination, thus kept on the stretch, multiplied the phantoms of terror, until to remain longer alone became unendurable.

Then, putting out the light, she crept forth into the night, to make her way to the mine, her namesake.

Every chance sound startled her; in every deeper shadow she pictured a lurking foe; until, breaking into a run, she rushed wild-eyed and panting into the shaft-house of the Pretty Polly.

Sinking exhausted on a bench, she went into hysterical weeping, and the astonished engineer could make out only her cry for her father.

He called down the shaft, and soon the judge came up in the cage, to clasp his child in his arms, and make explanations which would at least relieve the pain of thinking him wanting in love.

Meanwhile, Belle the Beautiful had started to return home, but on her way had come upon two men, one of whom she recognized by his voice as Wat Tigh.

Their stealthy movements awakened her suspicions at once; and as they stopped within a few paces of her, she was enabled to overhear their conversation.

"Everything is ready to touch off," said Wat; "and we must do it to night. You are sure that all the boys have had the signal?"

"Yes, every mother's son of 'em."

"For midnight!"

"For midnight."

"Curse the luck! How things have turned out! I hoped to have both them galoots out of the way. But it won't do to wait a day longer. I'm afraid some o' the boys is weakenin'. Ef they lose their grip onc't, it's all up with our leetle game. They'd sell us out, every man hedgin' fur himself, an' the devil ketch the bindmost."

"I reckon that's so, boss."

"Waal, we'll spring the trap while they're all under ground; an' it'll be queer ef we don't ketch some bind-legs an' some tails."

Then followed a period of impatient waiting, while Wat growled at the delay of a comrade.

He finally made his appearance, reporting everything in readiness, and the three set off, followed by Belle the Beautiful.

What was the plot? He had said "both them galoots;" and Belle did not fall into the mistake of supposing one of them to be Judge Pettigrew. The men Wat Tigh hated and feared were Iron Despard and Tiger Dick.

Forgetful of danger to herself, she shadowed them up the ravine in which Fool's Luck was situated, until they came to a dam by which the stream that had flowed down the valley, before the discovery of gold, had been stopped and its waters deflected into another channel. Here was a great volume of backwater which, if suddenly released, would sweep the gulch from end to end, wrecking the camp and bearing tents and shanties away on its tidal-wave, as if they were card houses.

At the base of this dam, Belle saw shadowy forms moving about, as if men were busily at work there. Some seemed to be shoveling the earth; others were hurrying to and fro. What could they be about? Repairing the dam? But if so, why this stealth? And if there had been any insecurity in so important a work, all Fool's Luck must have disengaged it.

She crept nearer, until she could hear their guarded orders:

"Is the train nearly laid?"

"You can touch it off in five minutes."

"Are you sure that was enough o' the giant powder?"

"To blow the whole outfit to Tophet an' back ef it was twice as big."

"You must give us ten minutes to git in position. We don't want to lose the gals nor the swag."

"Fix yer own time; give us the signal, an' up she goes!"

Then they were plotting to blow up the dam and sweep the camp down the gulch! The Little Lucky mine would be flooded, even if the Pretty Polly, leaving the mouth of its shaft at a greater elevation, escaped. And the man she

loved was in the Little Lucky to be drowned like a rat in its hole!

Belle turned sick and faint. Then her courage revived. She must warn them—him!

She was creeping away when she was abruptly challenged:

"Hallo, pardner!"

She could not respond. Her voice would betray her. What was to be done? Her heart fluttered in her throat.

While she stood undecided, the man advanced.

"What's the row?" he asked.

"Who is it, Tom?" asked another voice. Now her retreat was indeed cut off; for this man was between her and the camp, directly in the line of escape.

"Blowed if I know," replied Tom.

"That's just what we're bound to find out then," responded the other; and he made his appearance directly before the terrified girl.

She now recognized both the men. The last speaker was lithe and active, from whom it would be impossible to escape by flight. The one in her rear was too stout to be a fleet runner, though he had the strength of a Hercules.

There was not a moment to be lost. She walked firmly toward the man who cut off her escape.

"Halt, and give the password!" he commanded.

The response was a flash of light instantaneous with a sharp report. He experienced the sensation of a blow on the breast. Then he felt himself sinkin' to the ground.

The deed was done. Not knowing—preferring not to know—whether her shot was fatal or not, the horrified girl sped away, almost leaping over the fallen man.

She heard several shots in her rear—heard Tom's voice and the crashing of his footsteps in pursuit—heard the alarm spread among the crowd—heard what seemed to be a general pursuit, excited voices raised in profanity, and the rush of many feet.

She was as agile as a young fawn. For a short distance, while her strength held out, she could outstrip the best of them.

Down the rocky gulch she sped, stumbling, sometimes falling and bruising herself terribly. Up and on again, until every joint ached and her brain swam, while her laboring lungs emed on fire.

At last the lights of Fool's Luck gleamed through the darkness.

Then she heard a rumbling explosion up the gulch whence she had come. She knew its significance. The barrier between the camp and death had been demolished. Soon the flood would sweep down the path along which her flying feet had borne her.

Her destination was the mouth of the main shaft of the Little Lucky. It was too late to hope to rescue those who were imprisoned below. Before they could be warned and brought to the surface, the shaft-house would be swept away, and the flood pouring down their only avenue of escape.

She could not save him, then; but she would die with him.

"Let me go down in the cage!" she demanded of the engineer.

She stumbled into the house, and was just able to gasp her wish.

"Miss Belle! for God's sake, what's—"

"Lower away! lower away!"

She had got into the cage. Her excited manner constrained immediate obedience.

With his hand on the brake-lever, the bewildered engineer released the windlass, and she began to descend.

Down that black abut, like the mouth of the nether pit, she was going to death.

Before she reached the bottom she heard a pistol-shot above and the tramp of heavy feet. Then the cage gave a sudden plunge. The rope had been cut. She was falling! Whither?

Her senses took no cognizance of the terrible crash. She did not feel the cruel shock. Kinl oblivion infolded her, shielding her from agonizing pain.

CHAPTER XXX.

ENTOMBED ALIVE!

FAR down in the bowels of the earth a strange scene was being enacted.

On either side of a partition of rock and ore a gang of men were busy with drills and blasting-powder, rending away the barrier that divided them.

Besides the miners, there were men who took no part in this work. They sat on rocks and kegs, playing cards and throwing dice, while they drank and smoked. These men, armed to the teeth, like buccaneers, joked and wrangled, according to the humor of the moment, heedless of the fact that an hour might see them engaged in deadly conflict with their counterparts on the other side of the wall.

On one side was Tiger Dick, on the other Iron Despard, each surrounded by his "army."

To one party came the intelligence of Polly Pettigrew's arrival at the shaft-house. Her father flew to the meeting with his restored child. Tiger Dick followed more leisurely.

He was his wonted cool self. He congratulated Polly on her restoration, and expressed

regret at the anxiety to which she had been exposed.

Her father was urgent to learn what she had experienced; but she told him that she was oath-bound to secrecy.

"That is no more than I expected," he said. "But let us see what can be learned without your aid."

He looked at her critically. Then he said:—

"You have been drugged."

"Drugged? My God!—and in the power of those devils!" cried Judge Pettigrew.

"I beg you to believe that I was perfectly safe. No further harm could come to me," said Polly, crimsoning.

"Oho!" said the Tiger, quickly. "Whence this confidence?"

"Never mind, so long as it is beyond the possibility of question that it is well founded."

"I haven't the least doubt of it," said Dick, with a twinkle in his eye.

"Captain Jack, or even Lige Bigelow, is to be relied on, you know, my dear judge."

The judge only groaned and ground his teeth.

But his daughter spoke up with sharp asperity.

"Neither Captain Jack nor Lige Bigelow had anything to do with it!"

"Oh, I beg pardon!"

But at this point Tiger Dick's attention was distracted by a startling event.

The gulch reverberated with a dull, deep roar, like a burst of thunder underground, if such a thing could be.

"What's that?" he cried. "It can't be a blast. It is louder than a dozen blasts combined."

He listened.

"Hark! Do you hear that continuous roar? It seems to fill the air. What direction does it come from?"

While they listened in bewilderment, pistol-shots and loud voices were heard at the shaft-house of the Little Lucky.

"Hallo! they're by the ears down there!" cried the Tiger.

The indefinable roar was increasing. Tongues of flame shot out from the shaft-house of the Little Lucky.

At the same moment came sounds of excitement from the camp.

Shots were fired. Yells were intoned. Then came the shrieks of women.

Flames shot up at several points. Hell seemed to have broken loose.

"Judge," said the Tiger, in firm, even tones, "you were mistaken as to the motive of Wat Tigh's withdrawal with his men. They have blown up the dam, and are now pillaging the camp. Inside of ten minutes this shanty will be the only remaining relic of Fool's Luck. The Little Lucky will be flooded and the men in it drowned like rats; and, if I mistake not, it is proposed to burn this place and asphyxiate us. Send your daughter down into the mine—that is the safest place for her now; and summon every fighting-man in our gang. If we defend this place, we shall live to see to-morrow's sun; if we fail, we are all doomed. See! here comes our turn. Lose no time!"

Even as he spoke he opened fire with both revolvers.

Then the place resounded with yells—some of them the death-cries of the victims of his unerring bullets.

It seemed as if he were half a dozen men centered in one, so terrible was his death-dealing onslaught. Unaided he checked the charge of the assailing party.

Meanwhile, Judge Pettigrew, having summoned assistance, placed himself at his side. And now he redeemed himself. Unthreatened by ignominy, he was no coward.

But a grander spectacle was going forward. A billow of foam was sweeping down the gulch. It was dimly visible in the starlight. It reached the camp, swept through it, and passed on, bearing away every trace of man's handiwork.

Wat Tigh, disappointed in his quest of Belle the Beautiful at the Bower, had centered his men on the shaft-house of the Pretty Polly, and fallen upon it with the fury of a demon, determined that no one whom he hated should escape.

Here the battle raged, above the reach of the tide.

But the flood was pouring down the shaft of the Little Lucky, forming a whirlpool over the spot.

The crash of the falling cage had startled the men in the mine. They found what appeared to be a man, or a youth, as far as dress went, lying stunned and bleeding in the cage, the hoisting-rope of which lay upon it like a writhing serpent. But the bloodless face and red-hair, now pulled down, at once enabled all to recognize Belle the Beautiful in this strange disguise.

Two of the men were about to lift her from the cage, when they were thrust aside by Iron Despard, who, with a cry of some intense emotion like the rage of a maniac, lifted her in his arms and bore her to a place where she could be laid on some coats spread for her reception.

But while he was trying to restore her to con-

sciousness, and others were shouting up the shaft to ascertain the cause of the accident as they supposed, their only exit to the upper air was filled with the smoke of the burning shaft-house. A moment later came the rush of falling water, in such volume that only one source was possible.

"Boys!" cried one, "the dam's gone!" Thereupon an awed hush fell upon every one. They knew that that meant death!

But there was no time to pause. The drift in which they stood was rapidly filling. Before they could gather their sunken faculties, the water was rushing knee-deep down the drift, like a river.

Struck with panic, they retreated pell-mell, soon reaching a point where an up-grade carried them beyond the reach of the water.

But they were cut off from their supply of air. That which surrounded them was compressed, like the air in a diving-bell, by the weight of the water which soon choked the main-shaft, and filled to the roof the gallery leading from it. When its oxygen was exhausted, then would come suffocation and death.

But Iron Despard was not thinking of this. His soul was at last shaken to its very foundation. He was bending over the woman who, unable to save him, had thought it a boon sweeter than any life had to offer, only to die with him.

The barrier of icy immobility behind which he had prisoned the mighty floods of his soul had gone down like the dam that had restrained the waters of the mountain reservoir; and now his passion, like that tumbling, roaring, foaming tidal-wave, poured forth over the woman whose devotion had freed it.

His face was bloodless and contorted, as if with the exorcism of a demon. His eyes glared. His teeth were set. His hot breath came in labored pants.

He looked as if he hated her and was ready to annihilate her, because she had had power to so move him.

She stirred. She drew a fluttering breath. She writhed slightly, knitting her brow, as if in pain.

The man ground his teeth, as if to suppress some sound that struggled for utterance.

She opened her eyes, looking full into his face—at first without intelligence, then with a quick lighting of recognition.

Infinite tenderness and deprecation spoke from those eyes for a moment, with the eloquence of such a love as few men are blessed with.

Then came a swift look of terror—but not of him; for she suddenly extended her arms, uttering his name:

"Despard!"

He knew it all. His love, like an arrow winged by Apollo, had pierced to the heart of the truth.

He knew that she had come down that shaft, not with the hope of saving him, but for the poor privilege of dying in his company. And this was the last appeal of her heart. In death, at least, let him not repel her.

The struggling giant in his breast burst the iron trammels of his will like withes. With a cry which seemed to rend its way from his heart, he clasped her in his arms, and rained kisses upon her face.

They swept from chin to brow, like red-tongued flames; yet to her hungry sense they were transformed into heavenly dew that filled her soul with the incense of content.

She felt fine arrows of pain dart through her in that close embrace; but the heart-eccstasy transcended any torture of the body.

Her arms clasped his neck; their lips were wedded; his arms were the walls of her Eden, shutting in the light and warmth, shutting away forever the outer darkness and chill.

"Tell me all!" he breathed into her ear.

"It was Wat Tigh. He has blown up the dam. I followed him, discovered his purpose, barely escaped capture, and ran here, pursued by him and his men. That's all."

"No! no!" he said. "Why did you come here, running into danger, instead of away from it?"

She nestled closer in his arms.

"Can't you guess why?"

"Tell me."

"Because—what you have known from the first—I love you!"

A convulsive tremor ran through him.

"So you sought certain death—"

"With you!"

He drew her arms from about his neck, and laid her back upon her couch of coats out of his embrace. She did not seem alarmed, as if it were possible that a change could come over his love. She seemed perfectly content to let him do as he willed with her. She smiled serenely, confidently in his face.

Both were oblivious of the open-mouthed men that stood about them, lighting this strange scene with their candles. So intense was this heart-drama that personal danger was for the moment lost sight of.

He bent over her, taking her face between his palms, while he gazed at her, shaken by some emotion that seemed to choke him.

"You have kindled a flame which, if you ever fail for one moment to feed it, will consume you," he said, huskily.

"Say that you love me, and I will risk the rest," she replied.

"I do! I do!"

His face dropped lower and lower until it touched hers. His voice sunk to a whisper.

"If you fail me, I will kill you, so help me God!"

He was shaken by a storm of sobs, and she felt hot tears falling upon her face.

That emphasis—"if you fail me"—told her all his sad story; why he had been so hard upon her; why the avowal of his tenderness now so overpowered him.

She kissed him, not on the lips, but on the brow, and drew his head down on her bosom, like a mother comforting a hurt child, murmuring:

"My poor Despard!"

Suddenly he started up, as if just awaking from a dream.

"My God!" he cried, "we are losing time—precious time! Men! men! through that wall lies our only chance of life. The Pretty Polly may have escaped flooding. Hark! If they are still tramping there is room for hope."

All listened. Profound silence reigned. The noise of battle above ground could not reach that lower level.

"At any rate, it's our only chance," he said. "Come! put out every candle not necessary to our work. Each robs us of oxygen now more precious than gold and diamonds. Then every man to work. It is life or death!"

They needed no urging. Those who would have "kicked" at the suggestion of work half an hour before, were now eager enough to receive drills.

All the candles were put out but two, and these were necessary to enable the hammerers to see the ends of the drills on which they were to deliver their blows.

Then there was a season during which the compressed air transmitted the sharp concussions to the drum of the ear like blows with a material substance. The men worked as they had never worked before, until the wall was perforated with holes.

The candles were burning dimly; breathing was fast becoming more and more painful—a sure sign of the exhaustion of oxygen.

At last the holes were charged and tramped hard.

"Men," said Iron Despard, "this blast may bring us deliverance, or it may bring us death! If it bursts a hole through the wall, there will be a chance of escape; if it fails, we are doomed. The burning powder will consume the rest of the oxygen, and fill the drift with poisonous gas, which we will have no means of dissipating. Unconsciousness and death will follow very quickly. If any of you have any sort of preparation to make, now is your last opportunity."

The men stared at one another, muta. They were oppressed by an awe never before experienced. They had regarded death, whenever they had given it a thought in their own cases, as something which would come to them, as to all men, above ground. But this being smothered in the bowels of the earth!

"I reckon we're as ready as we ever will be," said Captain Jack, solemnly.

Iron Despard applied the flame of the candle to the end of the fuse.

Then all retired down the gallery as far as possible, until an angle afforded them protection from the flying fragments of rock.

A season of terrible suspense followed.

Iron Despard held Belle the Beautiful in his lap. Her arms were about his neck. Her mouth was where the breath from her parted lips swept his.

She breathed with great difficulty. The absence of pure air was telling on her weakness.

"My darling!" he sighed, "am I to lose you just as I have found you?"

"If we die together!" she murmured faintly, and smiled as his kiss rewarded her tender thought.

Then came a concussion that seemed as if it must rend the earth to its center. The charge had been an unusually heavy one, because it was their last chance; and the compression of the air intensified its effects.

All were stunned. In the darkness they lay without motion.

Iron Despard revived after a time, he knew not how long. He heard some one moving near him.

"Who is that?" he mumbled, like a drunken man.

"Me," responded Captain Jack's voice, yet so thick that it was scarcely recognizable.

"Is the wall down?"

"I don't know."

"We must find out without delay. The concussion must have stunned us all. Hallo, men! Is there no one else conscious?"

He heard unintelligible mutterings from one or two. The rest lay still.

He felt that Belle the Beautiful hung in his arms unconscious.

The anguish of the thought of her peril stimulated him to renewed life. Kissing her, he

laid her down gently, and then staggered to his feet.

He had put an end of candle in his pocket in anticipation of this contingency. With difficulty he succeeded in lighting it. It burned with a smoky flame that gave scarcely any light. He had to exercise the greatest care to keep it from going out.

"I anticipate the worst," he said. "There is no air in here."

Then, as he stumbled forward, the cry of his heart was:

"Oh, God! it cannot be that she is to be entombed here!"

Captain Jack's voice called after him.

"I can't get up. I never was so weak. Oh!" —a groan. "My head swims and my breast is on fire!"

He heard this as in a half-waking dream. He kept on mechanically, urged by his fixed purpose.

The passage was filled with debris of the blast. Every trivial obstacle seemed almost insurmountable. He gasped for breath. His eyes protruded. Sometimes he stood still. Sometimes he stumbled forward. Now he was erect. Now he crept on hands and knees over a fragment of rock that in a normal state would have offered no obstruction to his progress.

So, after infinite pains, he gained the wall.

He went over it again and again, with the mechanical iteration of a man who refuses to accept despair. A great cavity had been torn into it. But there was no perforation.

Then he sat down, looking at the dull flame of the candle. He gazed at it stupidly. His mind was void of thought.

Strange sounds rung in his ears. He thought he heard men talking. Had some one else revived sufficiently to communicate with Captain Jack?

"It's no use, boys," he said. "We're done forever on this earth."

His attention, being attracted to them, reverted to Belle the Beautiful. He began to make his way back to her.

On the way the candle dropped from his nerveless hand, and he was left in utter darkness.

He called to Captain Jack, to be guided by his voice. There was no response.

He crept forward until he believed that he must be in her vicinity. Then he struggled to light a match. But after he had broken two or three, dropped one that he finally got lighted and blown another one out with his gasping breath, he gave it up in despair.

Only his great love sustained him now. He bent all his mighty will to the task of clinging to fast-ebbing consciousness until he had found her, that he might die with his arms about her.

"One more kiss!—one more!" was the cry of his great heart.

He felt about. Now he grasped a foot. Its size and the coarse boot told him that it was not hers. Anon his hand fell upon a tangled beard, whose owner took no offense at his clutch. Another time a broad breast lay pulseless beneath his hand.

Again and again he sank upon his face, feeling that the end had come. As often his mighty will, at the behest of deathless love, fought off the vertigo and the stupor that crept over him.

At last he touched a hand that was smaller and softer than his own. He knew that it was she; and yet his jealous love would leave no room for doubt. His hand passed over her like lightning, and then he sank down beside her, with his fingers tangled in her hair and his lips to hers.

"At last! at last!"

So oblivion found him, and infolded him gently.

CHAPTER XXXI.

BACK TO LIFE.

BUT the end was not yet.

Tiger Dick had not yet capitulated to Fate!

Reinforced by his men, he fought no longer on the defensive.

He routed the enemy, and then gave hot chase, raising the cry:—

"No quarter, except to Wat Tigh! He must be taken alive!"

Fate, who ever smiles on the brave, favored him, and put him on the track of the ringleader of the secret band.

Wat saw that there was no escape. The chambers of his revolvers were empty. Then in a paroxysm of fury that transformed him into a veritable fiend, foaming at the mouth, he buried himself upon his pertinacious foe, and sought to barter life for life.

But his bloodthirsty bowie was deftly turned aside, and then twisted out of his grasp.

Disarmed, he struggled in the wrestler's grip, until his thews and sinews fairly cracked. But as he had once found his master in this exercise in Iron Despard, so he was now found in Tiger Dick one who could handle him still more easily.

It was animal strength against skill, and for a while the Tiger toyed with him, laughing tantalizingly.

"What, me noble juke? You're the very devil, aren't you, in a tussle? Ah! that was

well meant, but you have been ill taught. See, this is the trick!"

And with a lightning evolution he plucked the burly ruskin from his feet, swung him into the air, and hurled him to the ground on the broad of his back, with a concussion which left little breath in his body to swear with.

Then setting his foot on his neck, he pinned him to his place until ropes were brought to bind him.

This explains why, when Iron Despard and his men listened, no sound from the other side of the wall came to them with the cheering intelligence that others were working for their deliverance.

Afterward, the continuous clatter of their tools prevented them from discovering when Tiger Dick and his force resumed work.

The situation in the Little Lucky was obvious to the Tiger.

"There is no escape through their shaft," he said. "The wall must be blasted through to liberate them, if they are still alive. We can soon learn the fact by listening for the sound of their working. Of course they will try to blast their way through. Come, men! At it with a will. We are all friends now. We may squabble over money, but when it comes to being drowned like blind kittens, or smothered in a hole in the ground, all men are brothers."

All seconded him, readily enough. Their blast was ready before that on the other side; so they waited.

The explosion came. It was ineffectual, as we know.

Then Dick cried:

"Never say die! Ours may fetch it! But they will be examining the wall. We must give them warning."

They did so, yelling at the top of their voices. These were the sounds that came to Iron Despard's dull senses, which he took for some one talking with Captain Jack.

They listened. No response came.

"Boys," said the Tiger, "cooped up as they are, that must have been a regular earthquake. They are probably stunned. Let's yell once more and then touch it off. It won't do to wait. They must be troubled for air; so we must take some risk."

They did as he directed, and then set off their own blast.

"Hurrah!" shouted the Tiger, as he felt the hot air rush by him, so filled with smoke that nothing could be clearly distinguished with his flickering candles—such as were not blown out.

Then came the rush of water through the jagged orifice which now united the mines.

Tiger Dick saw the bodies of unconscious men tumbled over and over in the flood, like logs in the surf; and for a few minutes he thought that, instead of helping the unfortunate, he had involved his own men in their fate. But it was only the water in the main shaft of the Little Lucky, as in the stand-pipe of a waterworks, seeking its level. As the outside flood had subsided, so that there was no more to rush in at the top, it was soon equalized.

At the blast-opening it was waist-deep; but it shoaled rapidly as one receded up the grade in the Pretty Polly.

Having checked the panic among his men, and called back such as were running away as for dear life, the Tiger shouted:

"Candles all! and to the rescue! A hundred dollars to the man that saves Iron Despard!"

With a candle burning in his bat and another held in his hand, he was the first to plunge through the yawning passage into the Little Lucky.

He passed bodies in which he felt no personal interest, leaving them to his men, while he searched for Iron Despard.

Further and further he penetrated, until he had passed round an angle where the water was up to his armpits. Then he was heard shouting lustily for help.

At last, when just about to give up the quest in despair, he had discovered a mass of red hair floating just beyond him.

It could belong to but one person in Fool's Luck; and knowing her passion for Iron Despard the Tiger guessed at once that Belle the Beautiful had found means of joining him at that fatal time.

A plunge forward, a clutch beneath the water, and he held something decidedly tangible in his grip. A lift, and two heads appeared above the surface—hers and Iron Despard's. She was fast locked in his arms.

So, in darkness and peril, face to face with death, they had come to an understanding! It was well, whether they survived or not. But they must live! It wouldn't do to let anything so good slip out of the world for the want of a few minutes' breath.

"Help! help! help!" shouted the Tiger, straining every nerve to make his way through the water, bearing the unconscious lovers with their heads above the surface.

He was soon joined. The bodies were borne up from the flood to dry land and on to the main shaft of the Pretty Polly, where they were rapidly hoisted to the world they had despaired of ever revisiting.

Here were hot water, the heat of the boiler-

furnace and the bunks of the engineer and some of the miners, who always slept at the mouth of the mine. Here, too, was Polly Pettigrew, almost frightened out of her wits, yet ready to render a sister-woman's assistance to the unfortunate Belle—if she could be called unfortunate in any situation, after the full fruition of her great love.

Iron Despard showed strong recuperative powers; but Belle the Beautiful was prostrated with weakness, though, upon examination, it was found that she had sustained no serious injury from the fall of the cage.

But she smiled sweetly as her lover watched beside her with a sleepless, almost savage solicitude. Her pallor gave her an aspect of vestal purity, and her love developed all her native refinement. Iron Despard was astonished and delighted to find that her speech was cultivated and perfectly free from slang.

But Tiger Dick would have his badinage.

"Haven't I won my wager?" he asked. "Aren't you ready to grant me the next cleverest fellow in Fool's Luck?"

"Yes, indeed!" said Belle, heartily. "I owe you my own life, and, more than all, Despard's."

And she and Polly forgave each other and became fast friends.

Judge Pettigrew had the fortune to rescue Captain Jack, and at the suggestion of Tiger Dick they settled their dispute by going into partnership.

Wat Tigh was set to "dancing a double-shuffle on air."

The dam was rebuilt, and Fool's Luck, under the name of Digby, entered upon a new and far more prosperous career. A church now stands on the site of the Bower. Lige Bigelow is looked upon as one of its "pillars." Polly Pettigrew is now as demure as a puss that has never raided the cream jar, having recently "corraled" the young minister.

Iron Despard with his treasure-trove of riches, sought a new home, where his wife, her past history buried, might find the society which she was fitted to grace. She adored her husband, and he hung over her with grateful tenderness that won for her the envy of less fortunate wives.

Tiger Dick went his adventurous way.

"I'm sorry to lose you," he said, as he held Iron Despard's hand in farewell. "I have never met a man who would so suit me as a partner. I have a notion that we might make a team 'as is a team.' But I don't grudge you your good luck, though I envy it, I swear! You needn't be jealous, though, if I sometimes sigh when I look back at my fortnight's acquaintance with Belle the Beautiful."

THE END.

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